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BRILLIANT NEW SCIENCE-FICTION NOVEL BY IRVING A. GREENFIELD

MANKIND'S HOPE FOR SURVIVAL LAY UNDER THE OCEANS—AND IN ONE MAN'S IMPOSSIBLE MISSION

WATERS OF DEATH

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UNWELCOME STRANGER

Warren looked sharply at the visitor from the mainland. "You intend to go down to the Barbuda Station?"

"And some of the others if my work demands it," Wilde answered.

"Ordinarily the sea farmers do not welcome strangers," Warren explained. "And now, since conditions have become even more difficult than usual, I would be unable to guarantee your safety."

"I ask for no such guarantee," Wilde answered. "I am sure that they will understand that I have come to help them."

"Or hurt them, if you should find that they are indeed responsible for the poor harvest," Warren said. "I think I had better tell you this right off. Jessup has lodged a threat against the government. . . ."

WATERS OF DEATH

IRVING A. GREENFIELD

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Part I: *COGITO ERGO SUM* (Descartes)

I

"THE DIRECTOR will see you now," the secretary said with a smile.

Dr. Robert Wilde nodded. He wanted to return her smile but did not. It had been many years since he had smiled at a secretary, especially one so young and so pretty. She could have hardly been more than twenty and he was thirty-five, married and had a son half her age. He sensed that she was looking at him and was tempted to glance back at her but he had already passed through the control beam and the door to the Director's office slid open.

The Director came out from behind his desk to greet Wilde. "I hope my summoning you did not interrupt anything important," he said, after shaking Wilde's hand. "I know how infrequently I have the opportunity to see you or any of the other scientists working at the Institute." He left Wilde's side and returned to his desk.

"No," Robert answered, "nothing important was interrupted."

"Please sit down." The Director gestured to the chair next to his desk. "Would you care for a cigarette or a cigar?"

Robert politely declined, and though he knew the offer was extended to put him at his ease it had the

opposite effect. He was truly concerned about his position at the Institute. Two years before he had suffered the ignominy of being passed over for promotion and the Director had started the interview by offering him a drink. He tried not to think how his wife Marion would react to another setback.

"I hope you don't mind," the Director said, "if I indulge. I find the cigars much more enjoyable than the cigarettes." The Director was a short, heavy-set man with a moon face and sharp twinkling eyes. The cigar looked absurd sticking out of his round face but he sighed with contentment. "How long has it been since I saw you last, Doctor?"

"Two years," Robert said crisply.

The Director made a humming sound and sat up. "That was a most unfortunate business," he commented. "Most unfortunate indeed!"

Robert nodded.

"I trust, though, things have not been too bad for you?"

"Not too bad," Robert answered with a sardonic smile. There would be little sense telling the Director what had happened to his personal life because the Institute had disciplined him. How could he explain to another man that Marion and he hadn't slept together for the better part of the past two years?

"I'm glad to hear that," the Director said. "Very glad indeed. You know I made a personal appeal on your behalf to the Minister of Science and I understand he brought your case before the Council of Five, but they voted against any remission of the charges brought against you."

Again Robert nodded. He felt more and more like

a doomed man. By rehashing the past, the Director was only succeeding in making the present dissolve. Why doesn't he come right out and tell me what I did this time?

The Director puffed hard on his cigar and sent up a cloud of pale blue smoke. "You must have known that independent research cannot be tolerated by the government?"

"Yes," Robert answered, "but I—"

The Director waved him silent. "There are no *buts*. The law is very explicit and it applies to all scientists, not only those of us who belong to the Institute of Oceanography and Marine Biology."

"I understand that now," Robert said humbly.

"Good!" the Director exclaimed. "That's why I recommended you for a special assignment."

Robert was too surprised to say anything.

"And what is more," the Director said, "you are temporarily given the rank of Project-Leader One and all the rights and privileges that go with it, including the extra monthly allowances for clothing, alcoholic beverages and those drugs which you and your family might use for pleasure."

Robert was not an emotional man, but his throat tightened. He coughed several times and thanked the Director.

"If your mission is successful," the Director said, with a broad smile, "you can be assured of good things happening to you."

"I never dared hope that this would happen," Robert said softly.

The Director stood up and walked to the large window. "That independent research work you un-

dertook," the Director said, keeping his back toward Wilde, "had something to do with—"

"The effects of overcontrol on the natural processes involved in sea farming," Robert said excitedly. Could it be that they were going to allow him to continue his work? Impossible!

"Just so!" the Director exclaimed. "Were you able to save any of your notes after you were reported by your superior?"

"No. The police destroyed everything," Robert answered. He was suddenly uneasy again, afraid he had answered too quickly and the Director was out to trap him into admitting he had committed all of his work to memory; but even if he had, it would be of no value now.

For the past two years he had to report to the Psychological Institute on a monthly basis for reorientation, which consisted of extensive therapy in the reduction of individual goals and frequent sessions during which his memory was scanned for any electrical impulses resulting from his research. These memory patterns were effectively neutralized by imposing a nanosecond burst of high-frequency electrical energy over them. He was permitted to recall nothing of his work except its title and the reinforced associations of guilt whenever he thought of it.

"Sometimes," the Director said, "we are too apt to destroy even in this day and age."

Robert did not know what response was expected of him and therefore remained silent and expressionless. He was already beginning to feel depressed. He wished the Director would not have mentioned his work. He silently reacted: I was wrong to work in-

dependently. It was a crime against the world government, against all of humanity.

"Will you come to the window?" the Director asked.

Robert joined him.

"What do you see?"

He glanced at the Director and then looked out at the city. He could see the vastness of Manhattan, with its huge buildings, its moving streets and millions of people. Off to one side was Long Island, joined to the center of the city by dozens of bridges over which sped automatic air cars and high-speed monorails that linked other parts of the megalopolis which stretched from Boston to Washington, D.C.

Directly below him on the East River a large submarine sea train was moving toward the lower bay and then out into the ocean where he knew she would dive and stay well below the surface of the sea until just outside the port of her destination, where she would again surface.

Robert faced the Director. "There are people, buildings, and—"

"What if I told you that those people down there were in great danger?" the Director asked.

"Naturally I would want to know if there was anything I could do to help them," Wilde answered.

The Director's cigar had become a stub but he still puffed at it. "Let's sit down again," he said. "I have several important things to show you." Once they were both seated the Director turned toward the other side of his desk and opened a cabinet, which housed a control panel. "Now watch," he said as he darkened the room and displayed televideo images

on the wall. "Do you recognize what you are looking at?"

"No, sir," Robert replied. Then he said, "That's our Barbuda Station, part of the Caribbean Sea Farm."

"That's right," the Director answered, flipping the images off the wall and bringing up the lights again. "Some years ago you spent a great deal of time down there, isn't that right?"

"Yes. That was where I did part of my doctoral research work."

"You're going back," the Director said.

Once again Robert couldn't mask his surprise. "Is that part of my assignment?"

The Director nodded. "Your profile from central headquarters indicates you had managed to get along with the sea farmers far better than most other outsiders who have found it necessary to deal with them. Furthermore, the Caribbean Sea Police indicated you were particularly friendly with a man named Jessup Coombs."

"But that was fifteen years ago!"

"The authorities have reason to believe that this Jessup Coombs is responsible for the loss in the last two harvests."

"Two harvests? Why just this morning on the video screen the newscaster said that the harvest had been beyond official projected quotas."

"It was twenty-five percent below minimal estimates," the Director said, banging out the remains of his cigar in an ashtray. "The last harvest was fifteen percent below minimal estimates."

Robert edged forward. He was a tall, lean muscu-

lar man with hair the color of beach sand and green eyes. In the past two years the expression on his face had altered from being almost boyish until it was no longer a face but had become a mask behind which he had learned to exist.

What he had just heard forced the facade to give way. "That means that we are already living on our reserves!" he exclaimed with horror.

"I see," the Director told him, "that you are beginning to understand the problem. Unless the situation is corrected as quickly as possible, then—"

"But if the authorities suspect Coombs," Robert said, "why don't they take the necessary measures?"

"It is not as simple as that. Coombs is a very important man down there."

"He was that fifteen years ago."

"He's more important now. He has been agitating for the government to improve the conditions of the sea farmers." The Director sighed wearily. "The man is obviously a troublemaker."

"But what can I do that the government can't?"

"You can become his confidant," the Director said. "You can tell us what the sea farmers are doing to the harvests and then we will be able to act."

"I am to spy?"

The Director clicked his tongue several times. "That is a bad choice of words, Doctor," the Director said. "We are giving you the opportunity to once again be part of the honored scientific community and at the same time render a valuable service to the rest of humanity."

"Have the harvests from the other sea farms been as bad?"

"No," the Director said. He leaned toward the control panel and pressed another button. Instantly a huge map of the world was projected on the screen. "As you know, our food supply comes from three main sources. One is the Caribbean, the second is Oceania, and the third is Sahara-Mediterranean. These three sea farms provide ninety percent of the world's food. The remaining ten percent is derived from conventional land-type agricultural stations which provide what meat and other products we use."

"Of course I know all that," Robert answered, somewhat irritated that the Director was giving him things that even his ten-year-old son John knew.

"The Caribbean Sea Farm provides sixty-one percent of all the food used."

"I had not realized it was that high," Wilde said.

"These figures are top secret," the Director told him.

"I understand," Robert replied.

"Then you will accept?"

Robert nodded.

"Good!" the Director exclaimed. "Very good." He pressed the videophone and said to his receptionist, "Miss Hartly, you may release the change in status of Dr. Wilde," he said. "Have it posted immediately and make sure that it is transmitted over all videoscreens by five this evening."

"Very good, sir!" she answered.

"A perfect gem of a girl," the Director said, switching off the videophone. "She has only been with me six months."

Robert nodded but gave no indication of any other emotion.

"Well," the Director said, "everything is settled."

"When do I leave?"

"Since time in this matter is very important," the Director told him, "I suggest that you plan on flying down to Antigua five days from today."

"Yes," Robert responded.

"I have arranged for you to be thoroughly briefed. Tomorrow you will report to the Government Information Center and ask for Mr. Steven Wong. He will be responsible for your briefing."

"It will be done electronically?" Wilde asked.

"The usual manner. The information you need will be transformed from our memory banks to your brain. In a matter of hours," the Director laughed, "you will have an encyclopedic knowledge of the area and when your mission is completed—" He stopped.

Robert smiled. "The Psychological Institute will erase all of it."

"All our agents," the Director said, "go through the same procedures. It makes them more valuable since it allows them to be used over and over again without any intrusion of morality or conscience to give them bad dreams."

"I have no objections," Robert said.

The Director leaned close to Wilde and offered his hand. "I wish you luck," he said. "I know you will find the answer."

"Thank you," Robert responded, shaking his superior's hand. He stood up.

"There's one more thing," the Director said.

Robert looked at him questioningly.

He seemed to be at a loss for words but he finally said, "Before I was able to receive the final approval from the Minister of Science, we had to have a thorough investigation of every aspect of your life."

Robert shrugged. He knew he had nothing of a political nature to hide. He had always been loyal to the government. Even when he had been punished for his unauthorized research he felt that it was a just retribution. The government could not tolerate its citizens going off in any direction that suited them. That kind of behavior would only lead to chaos.

The Director's face became somewhat flushed. "We know that your relationship with Marion has suffered over these past two years."

Robert felt his own color rise. "It will eventually work out," he said softly.

"We know that from time to time you have visited our government Sex Centers though not as often as another man might have in a similar situation and that you ordinarily do not use erotic fantasy pills or any other type of drug to—"

"I have never used drugs," Robert said, cutting him short.

The Director nodded. "Please," he said, placing his hand on Robert's arm, "I understand how embarrassing this must be for you, but hear me out."

"If you are going to tell me that Marion is having an affair with another man, don't." His voice became softer. "I already know that."

"We were sure that you did," the Director said,

"but I wanted to tell you that Miss Hartly is available to you any time before you leave."

"Thank you," Robert said.

"You may call her any time of the day or night by dialing this number," the Director said, taking a small card out of his pocket and handing it to the doctor.

Robert wanted to refuse the card but on second thought he decided to accept it. He had not had a woman for almost four months and lately, he was beginning to feel great surges of sexual energy. He had even approached Marion but she told him she had been with her lover during the afternoon and was no longer in the mood. When he suggested that she take a sex stimulant she bluntly said she had no wish to have him make love to her.

"I will see you once more," the Director said just before they reached the door.

"I appreciate all you have done for me," Robert said.

A moment later he walked through the sliding doors. Just before he left the anteroom he stopped and studied Miss Hartly. She was indeed a beautiful young woman with a small-boned figure, girlishly high breasts that stood out under her tight-fitting uniform. Her hair was blond.

She smiled at him when she realized he was looking at her.

He returned the gesture.

II

As soon as the door closed the Director returned to his desk and swung around to face the wall behind him. Instantly it was illuminated with the images of several men and the Director was in direct video communication with three other members of the government.

They were seated around a table. The man on the left side of the screen with the childlike innocent look on his face was Kurt Zahn, Chief of the Special Security Police. The heavy-set individual next to Zahn was General Albert Teateau, and the third individual, with a well-trimmed van-Dyke and dark-framed glasses, was Ahura Mazda, a member of the Council of Five. He was the first to speak. "Permit me to congratulate you," he said to the Director. "Dr. Wilde is an admirable choice."

"He is most anxious to regain his lost position," the Director said, with more than a trace of obsequiousness in the tone of his voice.

Teateau laughed: "From what we just heard, he had more than that to regain. This business about his wife interests me."

"How so?" Zahn questioned.

"Does the good doctor know who his wife's lover is?" Teateau asked.

"Yes," the Director answered.

"And he is willing to accept it?" the General questioned further.

"He neither accepts it nor condones it," Zahn answered.

"Then why doesn't he apply for the dissolution of the marriage?" Mazda asked. "We have reached that stage in our sociological development where marriage no longer holds the commitments for a man and wife that it did back in the early stages of our development."

Zahn spoke again. "Dr. Wilde has a strong loyalty to his son," he told the group. "Unconsciously the man feels guilty that he has brought disgrace upon the boy and would do nothing more to injure the boy."

"But that's absurd!" Mazda explained. "There are millions of children in government centers who are being raised with the best of care."

"Unfortunately, Dr. Wilde has some deeply embedded ideas," Zahn explained. "In a way the man is kind of a living anachronism, much the same way that the giant sea turtle is. Would you believe," Zahn said, "that he insisted on a traditional wedding when he married?"

The General laughed. "His wife must be more of our time than her husband."

"You understand," Mazda said addressing the Director, "the full reason why we accepted your recommendation to use Dr. Wilde?"

"He is familiar with the sea farmers. He once knew Jessup Coombs and—" He trailed off because each of the three men on the videoscreen looked questioningly at the others.

Mazda's brow furrowed. He looked accusingly at the Chief of the Special Security Police. "It was my understanding," Mazda said acidulously, "that you were to attend to that."

"Perhaps," Zahn replied, "this matter should be discussed further." His eyes darted toward the Director.

"At times, Zahn, your passion for secrecy is appallingly ludicrous and is only surpassed by your even greater passion to develop problems where none existed before."

The Chief of the Special Security Police took the rebuke without so much as a twitch of his lips or an extra flicker of his eyelids.

Mazda turned his attention to the Director. "I had hoped that you would be thoroughly acquainted with our purpose," he said, "but since you have not been told, it is time that you were. Will you please activate your security channel."

The Director switched on the security override for the video circuit. A high-pitched whine instantly filled his office and then subsided. A voice that belonged to neither of the three men on the screen or to the Director announced that the channel was secure for transmission.

"Now," Mazda said to Zahn, "will you explain to the Director what purpose Dr. Wilde is to serve?"

Zahn looked out of the screen. "The Psychological Institute has found that Dr. Wilde has a deep need to assert his individualism and would do almost anything to accomplish this."

The Director became flustered. "But he has been under treatment and was certified as having success-

fully completed his reorientation training," he said.

"His individualistic needs have been effectively masked by special thought-wave control techniques."

"I don't see what this has to do with his present assignment," the Director said.

"He is going to be allowed to assert this individualism," Mazda said. "He will give us the necessary information on how the sea farmers are sabotaging their yield and who the leaders are."

"That much I knew," the Director said.

Mazda ignored him and continued: "He will then appeal to the world government to send a punitive expedition into the area, which General Teateau will lead, and Dr. Wilde will be a world hero. This will satisfy his need for individual expression and at the same time serve our ends."

The Director felt that there was something lacking in the explanation he had just been given but he could not even begin to guess at what it was.

"After a few months of triumph," Zahn said, "Dr. Wilde will be denounced as having falsified evidence in order to further his own ends and he will then be tried and imprisoned for the rest of his life."

The Director nodded but none of it made much sense. It seemed to be a terribly elaborate scheme in order to accomplish a very simple thing—the punishment of those sea farmers responsible for the short harvest. But he dared not say this.

Zahn said, "Dr. Wilde will be the means by which the government will put a stop to the trouble in the Caribbean area, which will serve as an excellent example for the other sea farmers throughout the world, and he will also allow us to show the sea farm-

ers that they too will receive justice from the government."

"I understand," the Director said, forcing enthusiasm into his voice.

"Excellent!" Mazda said. "Your cooperation in this matter is greatly appreciated."

"It is a duty and an honor to serve," the Director answered. The screen dimmed and the images faded. He deactivated the security channel and turned back to his desk.

He knew that he had not done Dr. Wilde the good turn he had thought he was doing when he decided to recommend him for the assignment. He sighed wearily. The ways of the government were not to be questioned.

He reached into his lower left-hand desk drawer and found a bottle of green-tinted pills. He would feel much better after he took one but even as he waited for the drug to take effect he was unable to accept what he had been told. It was too elaborate! Then he suddenly realized that none of the three men had made one mention of the real issue involved in the situation, which was the threat of mass starvation, unless the next two harvests would be far above what the previous two had been. The drug took effect and he smiled. He had to agree with the wisdom of the government: it always acted in the best interests of the people.

Zahn waited until the non-transmission signal flashed on before he said to Mazda: "I don't think the Director accepted your explanation."

"Perhaps," Mazda answered, "he did not, but he will after he has had time to think about it."

"There was absolutely no need to tell him more than he already knew," Zahn said, more piqued by Mazda's sureness than he had been before by his criticism. If it wasn't for the fact that Mazda was popular with the people, he would have been excluded from the plan altogether. He had no other talent than that of a poser.

Zahn glanced at the General, whose chief asset lay in the fact that he commanded a highly mobile strike force of two million men. He needed the two of them if the first part of his plan to seize control of the government was to be effective.

"Don't look so downhearted," Mazda said smilingly. "So far everything is going well."

Teateau laughed. "You should take more time for diversion. A little enjoyment will give you a new perspective on life. If you would care to join me, I am at this moment on my way to a party where I am sure you will find delightful ways to shed your cares."

"No thank you," Zahn replied. "Perhaps another time."

"Suit yourself!" the General exclaimed. He turned to Mazda: "Are you leaving?"

"Yes," Mazda said. "We have successfully concluded our business here, unless of course Zahn has something more?"

"There is nothing," he answered and waited until the other two left the video conference room before returning to his office. He informed his secretary that he did not wish to be disturbed for at least an

hour. Then he removed two wafer-thin pieces of impulse-recording plastic from his special files and set them in the playback machine. He closed his eyes and listened to the voice of Dr. Robert Wilde.

Zahn was filled with an inner glow. The practice of reviewing the memory records of those individuals who undergo reorientation at the Psychological Institute not only gave Zahn a deep insight into every aspect of various government departments but it also provided him with information vital to the success of the Special Security Police. But in the case of Dr. Wilde there was a much greater dividend than Zahn had ever believed possible.

The doctor through his individual research on the effects of overcontrol had foreseen the poor harvests and had predicted that yield would continue to drop off until some sort of natural balance was effected.

Zahn was quick to grasp the significance of what this would mean in terms of governmental structure. A man or a group of men who could promise a starving population food would be all-powerful.

His plan was to unleash the fury of the people against the sea farmers and reduce their number by half and then destroy an equal number of people who were not sea farmers so that the total population would be halved.

Those who remained would have enough food and he and the men with him would be the absolute power. The prospect of having so much power at his disposal had an almost orgasmic affect on him. His body trembled and his breath came in short gasps but the thrill was purely psychological. Zahn was impotent.

He had not shared the full extent of his plan with either Mazda or Teateau. He told them nothing about destroying half of the population. He let them believe that once the sea farmers were brought to their knees the problem would be over. They accepted what he told them about the people looking upon them as saviors. He knew the present government would resign to avoid bloodshed and allow them to take control.

Zahn made no mention to his co-conspirators of Dr. Wilde's memory cards or the fact that the harvests might be poor as a result of a cause other than sabotage, or that the doctor had suspected a second factor which was more significant than over-control in its effect on sea farming.

Zahn switched off the machine. He was confident that as long as he knew what had to be done when the time came for action, he would eventually become the total master of the world. It was a goal worthy of his talents!

III

As soon as Robert left the Director's office he went to the nearest phone center. A recorded voice told him that a circuit was available for voice dialing. He identified himself and then requested a number which would put him in touch with his counselor at the Psychological Institute. A few moments passed and a woman said, "Yes, Robert?"

"I have just come from the Director's office," he said, and went on to explain what had happened.

"That is wonderful," the woman answered. She sounded almost as though she were smiling. "I am so happy for you!"

"Do you know Mr. Wong at the Psychological Institute?" he asked.

A moment of silence passed and then a man said, "You know, Robert, that it is against rules to answer questions that do not pertain directly to your own attitudes."

"I am sorry," Robert answered.

"There is nothing to be sorry for," the woman said airily. "Now remember," she told him, "you can do much for yourself if you successfully carry out this assignment."

"My son John will be pleased," he said.

"And your wife?"

Robert hesitated.

"You need not be ashamed of saying anything to me," the woman said in a warm whisper. "I know how much these past two years have hurt your relationship with Marion. I should think that this new turn in your life would make a difference."

"I hope so. If not for me," he said, "then for John. He's at that age where he's beginning to notice things and ask questions."

"Then you must explain to him," the man said, "that our way of life permits a man or a woman to have more than one love relationship. If you would tell him that Marion is not only his mother and your wife but she is also the sexual partner of any man she chooses. You still cling to outmoded social customs."

Robert did not answer.

"Sooner or later," the woman's voice said, "you will have to tell John."

"Yes," Robert agreed. "Perhaps when my assignment is over."

"That would be a wonderful time," the woman said. "Is there anything else, Robert?"

"No."

"Goodbye," her voice whispered.

He stared stupidly at the phone. He did not understand what had happened. The conversation seemed predesigned to upset him. His confusion turned into anger. He seethed with resentment, but against whom or what? He did not know. He had never been able to associate a face with either voice. He had never seen his counselor.

Whenever he went for a reorientation session, a

technician led him into a small, dimly lit room and told him to remove his jacket and lie down on the couch. He was left alone to listen to music which he could not identify and on the ceiling, directly above him, there was an extraordinary play of colors that always paralleled the flow of the music. He breathed deeply and enjoyed the scented air.

In the beginning of his reorientation there was only the man's voice. But shortly after Marion and he had stopped having sexual relations the woman's voice became part of each session. Often the man's voice made Robert think about his father, but the woman's voice did not even hold the reality of a memory.

Once Robert dared to question the identity of the counselor and was quickly rebuked in what seemed to be a combination of both voices and told that each individual undergoing treatment created his own counselor. He did not believe it.

As quickly as Robert's anger blazed, it subsided. Only by developing the capacity to see the absurdity of being angry at a disembodied voice did he manage to remain Robert Wilde and not some new-born creature without a single thought that did not belong to the government.

When he had discovered the dynamics of the reorientation process he developed ingenious methods to preserve his inner integrity. Each session became a game which he purposefully set out to lose and by losing won.

"Say again . . . Say again . . . Say again . . ." the recorded voice repeated over and over again.

Robert was jolted out of his own thoughts. "This

voice transmission is completed," he said and waited for the correct signal light to flash.

When the blue light came on Robert left the phone center and returned to the Institute's library where he had been assigned after he was no longer permitted to engage in any scientific work.

After brooding over this phase of his punishment at the beginning of his reorientation, he had come to recognize and accept the basic fact that though he was not held in the confines of a prison, he was indeed a prisoner and as such was forced to find ways to make each day meaningful. The library gave him access to the many different sciences practiced at the Institute and he not only read everything connected with his own specialty which was marine biology, but he gained an excellent background in other disciplines such as geology, oceanography and chemistry.

Only in his relationship with Marion was he unable to keep himself whole, and because he had loved her this failure became a wound that constantly bled. As he entered the library Robert wondered what Marion's reaction would be to his new assignment and promotion. Suddenly he wanted her so badly that his desire became a physical ache. Afraid that he might be disappointed again, he sat down at his desk and tried not to think about her.

IV

"Good night," Robert said to his son as he switched off the lights.

"Dad?" John called.

Robert turned toward the bed. "Yes?"

"I'm glad you were promoted," the boy said. "The kids at school will have to act differently—what I mean is that everything is all right now, isn't it?"

"Sure it is," Robert answered and went back to the bed to tousle the boy's hair. "Now you better go to sleep."

"Can't you even give me a hint why you're going down to the Caribbean?"

"It's just an assignment," he answered.

"Please, Dad, I won't tell."

"If it was anything more than just a routine trip," Robert said, "don't you think I'd tell you?"

John reached up and put his arms around Robert's neck. A moment later he kissed him. "Good night, Dad," he said and slipped down under the light blanket.

Closing the door behind him, Robert left the bedroom and went into the living room where Marion was watching the videoscope. "The boy is more excited than I remember seeing him in a long time," he said.

She glanced at him but made no comment and continued to watch the videoscope.

"I thought once this assignment is over," Robert said, still standing and looking at her, "that we might be able to take a trip somewhere."

"Where?" she asked without facing him.

"Any place you would like," he answered. She wasn't making things easy for him. She remained as withdrawn as ever but he still found her beautiful and desirable. She was a moderately tall woman with a willowy body, full high breasts and well-shaped hips. She had rich brown hair which she wore short and brown eyes with flecks of yellow in them. Her facial features were almost classic. She did not look thirty years old.

"Where?" she asked again, facing him.

He shrugged. He had used the idea of taking a trip more to get her attention than as something he had really thought out. "Any place—"

"What I really like about you," she said, "is your ability to be definite." She reached over to the videoscope and turned it off. Then, slipping her legs out from under her, stood up. "I'm going to bed," she said.

Robert followed her into the bedroom. He stood near the glass door overlooking the terrace. The night was clear and he could see the running lights of several ships as they moved through the sound.

He turned toward Marion. She had taken off her uniform and was standing in her bra and panties. "Aren't you pleased about the promotion?" he questioned.

"I said I was," she answered, removing her bra.

Marion had no compunction about undressing in front of him or sleeping naked in the same bed with him even though she would not permit him to touch her. He knew it was her way of striking back at him for failing. He had told her as much many times and she always answered, "If it bothers you why not sleep in another room or, better still, why don't we just separate?" He refused to do either and though he suffered an agony of frustration he was determined to endure it, not only because he still believed he loved her and hoped that one day she would again return his love, but because he did not want to turn John over to a government child center.

"Yes, you did," he said.

"You can't expect me to jump up and down like John," she told him, removing her panties.

"You could show more enthusiasm," he said sharply.

She raised her eyebrows. "Why? The promotion is only temporary, which means that for it to become permanent depends on how you carry out your assignment." She smiled at him. "I would not venture any bets on that. If there is a way for you to foul up, you will."

"Such confidence!" he exclaimed hotly, "does you credit!"

Marion moved closer to him. "You want me to have confidence in you?"

"A wife—"

She threw up her hands in disgust. "You still think of me as your wife? You still think in those old-fashioned terms of husband and wife!" she shouted accusingly. "Haven't you learned anything in your reorientation course? I am not your wife. In the past

two years I have been the sex partner of three different men. I am more wife to them than to you. So you received a temporary promotion—you want me to take you into my arms and say all is forgiven, all the humiliation I had to stand, all the hopes that went down the drain when you—" She halted for a moment to catch her breath. "I know what you want," she said and thrust her naked body against him. "This is what you really want."

The sudden push of her bare breasts against him took him by surprise but in an instant he recovered and flung his arms around her, locking her in his embrace. "Yes," he said throatily, "yes, I want you. I love you!"

She struggled against him. "I don't want you!" she screamed. "I don't want any part of you." Her fists beat against his face and chest.

His passion died and, filled with rage, he flung her from him. She fell across the bed.

"I can't stand the sight of you!" she yelled. "You're a loser, a nothing, and will always be a nothing."

He bit his lip. Marion had never reacted as violently as she just had.

"Don't stand there looking at me," she shouted. "If you were any part of a man you'd beat me."

"If I were anything but what I am," he answered, forcing his anger under control, "I'd kill you."

"At least that would be something positive," she mocked. "But you won't do it. No, you'll think about doing it and the thought will be sufficient."

"Enough!" he shouted. "You have already said enough!"

"No," she answered, springing up from the bed. "I

have not said enough. I was going to tell you this anyway but when news of your promotion came over the videoscope, I decided to wait—but now there's no need to wait. I'm pregnant."

Robert's knees felt as though they were dissolving. He fought to keep standing.

"Aren't you interested who the father is?"

"Do you know who he is?" Robert questioned.

Marion flushed. "It doesn't matter," she said. "I have already made the necessary arrangements to turn the child over to the government."

"That's your concern," he said. "The child is not mine."

Marion smiled. "You're so right," she told him. "So very right!"

He glared at her. "That's what you'd like to do with John, isn't it?"

She didn't answer.

"I'll tell you this," he said, in a low threatening voice, "you can sleep with whomever you want, do what you want, but you'll never get me to agree to sending John away."

"It's out of your hands," she said triumphantly.

"What?" he advanced toward her. "Why is it out of my hands?"

"I—" She looked at him and faltered.

"What did you do?" He grabbed hold of her naked shoulders and began to shake her. "What did you do?"

"I volunteered for duty in the Sex Center," she said.

Robert was stunned. He let go of her. "A government whore!" he exclaimed.

"Be careful about what you are saying," she warned, "be very careful."

Robert knew the rules; every man in the world knew them. A relationship was automatically declared null and void if the woman of her own free will became a member of a Sex Center. She had taken his son from him and there was nothing he could do about it. "You spiteful bitch!" he shouted and in a blind rage struck her across the face. The blow jerked her head to the side and brought a stream of blood from her nose. He struck her with the back of his hand. "I should have done this a long time ago," he shouted grabbing hold of her and forcing her to her knees.

Marion screamed.

"Daddy—Daddy, what are you doing to her!"

John was in the doorway. He came running into the bedroom and threw himself on Robert. "Leave her alone . . . leave her alone," he cried, pummeling Robert's face and chest with his small fists. "I hate you . . . I hate you . . ."

Robert let go of Marion and struck out at John.

The blow knocked the child to the floor. He crawled to his mother and put his arms around her.

Robert bent toward him but the boy shrank away. "I didn't mean to hit you," he said.

"I hate you!" John screamed. "I hate you!"

"This is what you've driven me to," Robert shouted, looking down at Maron. "This is what you wanted."

She gathered John into her arms and pressed him against her naked breasts. "You saw him," she cried to the child, "you saw him beat me."

"I hate you!" John shouted up at him.

Robert backed out of the bedroom and took his jacket from the hall closet. Quickly he left the apartment. When he was down at the street level he got into his autocar and set its guidance control for the city. A few minutes later the autocar stopped in the huge parking area next to the entertainment center.

For a while he prowled the brightly lit midway and as his anger cooled he found himself standing in front of a phone center. He was about to call his counselor but then changed his mind. Instead he asked for a video connection with Miss Hartly. A few moments later he was looking at her.

She wore a diaphanous white gown that hid nothing of her body. She smiled at him and immediately said, "I'm glad you called."

His tongue felt thick and dry. "May I see you?" he finally asked.

"Aren't you doing that now?" she teased.

He began to sweat. "I mean be with you," he said harshly.

"Yes," she answered and told him where she lived.

Part II: *MEN MUST ENDURE*
(*King Lear* Act V, Scene 2)

V

Jessup Coombs was purposefully kept waiting by the Civil Administrator of the Caribbean Area for the better part of the morning and now that it was near lunch time he was told by the Administrator's secretary that he would have to wait until later in the afternoon to meet with the Administrator.

"Thank you," Jessup said, "but you tell Mr. Warren that I came here at his bidding and the next time he wants to see me he can come out to the Barbuda Station."

"But Mr. Warren said—"

He gave the woman a big smile. "You tell him that I just wasn't interested in what he said," he said, and went to the door. Jessup was a tall, broad-shouldered muscular man with a strong jaw and flashing black eyes. He wore faded blue work pants, a sleeveless black polo shirt opened at the neck, and in his hand he carried a wide-brimmed straw hat which all of the sea farmers wore when they were not at sea. From his belt hung the traditional knife of his people.

The secretary, a small, birdlike woman, became flustered. "You must stay!" she exclaimed.

Jessup stopped and faced her. "But why?" he questioned. "Haven't I waited long enough for Mr. Warren?" He was not angry with her. If he felt anything

toward her, it was a kind of sorrow. She was from the mainland and was out of place in the tropical sea islands.

His question seemed to upset her even more. "Mr. Warren—"

"The devil with him!" Jessup exclaimed.

"Oh!" she cried.

"Jessup!" a man called.

He recognized Warren's voice. "I thought if I put the shoe on the other foot you'd stop playing coy. How long have you been watching me on your video-screen? I bet since I first arrived here."

"You will wait," Warren told him.

"No," Jessup said, "I will not wait." He turned and went to the door. Two uniformed government men entered the anteroom before he managed to get to the door.

"I think you will wait," Warren said smugly.

Jessup backed up. He looked at the two men. One was bigger than the other. "I guess one of us is about to be proved wrong," he said.

"Oh, please Mr. Jessup, don't do anything foolish!" the woman pleaded.

He paid no attention to her but spoke to the Civil Administrator. "You have no authority to hold me here against my will."

The two men advanced on him. He feinted a lunge for the larger man but grabbed hold of the smaller one and with the grace and speed of a jungle cat lifted him above his head and threw him into the gut of the larger one who grunted and then doubled up.

"That will be enough," Warren shouted.

"Then see me now!"

A door slid open to the right of the secretary's desk. "You may come in," Mr. Warren said.

Jessup winked at the secretary, glanced at the two men who were just getting to their feet, and said, "I'm sorry, men, but—"

"Are you coming, Mr. Coombs?" Warren questioned impatiently.

"Yes," Jessup answered and walked nonchalantly into the Civil Administrator's office. The door closed behind him and he advanced across the room until he stood directly in front of Warren's desk.

"The trouble with you and your people," Warren said, "is that you have never learned to respect authority." Warren was a dignified-looking man with a full head of snow-white hair, pale blue eyes and pink childlike cheeks. For all his years in the tropics, he had never tanned. He wore an immaculate white suit with the official government insignia embroidered in gold and silver threads over his left breast.

"You did not have me make a six-hundred-mile trip to lecture me on my lack of respect for authority," Jessup said tersely.

"Sit down!"

"All right," Jessup said, "I'm seated."

Warren leaned back in his chair. "How are things at the sea farm?" he asked.

Jessup placed his arms on the arm rests of the chair. "You know how they are," he answered.

"I am sorry that we were forced to cut the food rations of the people," Warren told him. He gestured. "But orders are orders. I don't make the rules, you know."

Jessup eased himself back. He was not going to permit himself to get angry.

"How does the next harvest look?" Warren asked.

"It's too early to tell."

The Civil Administrator reached for his mail opener and began to tap it on his hand. "If it was like the last or below it, we shall be forced to further reduce the food allotment for your people."

"They are your people, too," Jessup answered, "or haven't you been told that?"

"There is no need for sarcasm, Mr. Jessup!"

"There is also no need for you or the government to mistreat them."

Warren heaved a sigh. "I know that you do not believe it," he said, "but I have repeatedly brought the matter of their inferior living conditions to the attention of the Council of Five. And I am sure that these conditions will be greatly improved once you and those who follow you refrain from the willful destruction of the harvest."

Jessup smiled.

"I see nothing humorous in what I have said," Warren told him sharply.

"I have heard that promise many times before. At least four times from you in the past few years," Jessup said.

Warren shifted uncomfortably. "The government has a great many things to take care of," he answered. "You know that once we found Mars unsuitable for mass colonization we had hoped to be able to find other planets in deep space suitable for this purpose. Even with our rigidly practiced birth control the

population of the world is far larger than the normal sources of food are able to supply. Our efforts to travel beyond our solar system have met with repeated failure." He shrugged his jacketed shoulders. "I have been told by friends in the Space Institute that we are not able to go into deep space because our solar system is completely surrounded by an ionization shell—"

Jessup became impatient. "That is not my problem, Mr. Warren," he said bluntly. "Except for the fact that untold billions have been spent since the nineteen-fifties on space exploration that could have been used to better things here on Earth. Now in the year 2167 there are enough problems on Earth without our having to go out into deep space to seek others. There would have never been a population problem if the government followed the true principles of eugenics and did not make it easy for men and women to bring children into the world."

The Civil Administrator flushed. "Such criticism of government policies is very dangerous," he said warningly.

Jessup shrugged. "Each time I dive," he answered, "my life is in danger."

"When will you know about the harvest?" Warren asked.

"In a month, perhaps."

"Why not before?"

"There are certain natural cycles that even the government cannot hurry," he said with a smile. "By the way," he went on, "to make one more point about the population . . ."

"I'd rather you didn't."

Jessup ignored him. "Ever since the major source of food came from the sea the government has seen fit to keep the sea farmers in the lowest economic group. Of all the people in the world only sea farmers must obtain special travel permits, only the sea farmer is not permitted to change either his geographical residence or occupation. His children are not educated beyond secondary school. A son must of absolute necessity follow his father's work. A daughter may look forward to the bearing of children. Only the sea farmer is subjected to the harshest type of penal code—" Jessup stopped. He had unwittingly summoned the terrible memory of the three years he had spent in the government prison on Kiska Island in the Aleutian chain off Alaska. The muscles in his face tightened and though the office was air-conditioned his forehead beaded with perspiration. He could almost feel the damp cold fog that rolled off the sea when the warm Japanese Current met and mingled with the waters from the Arctic. Fog so thick that a man could lose himself if he ventured a few feet away from his hut. And the land so barren, so bleak, that the only kind of life it would support was a species of lichen, hordes of migratory birds, and seals when they mated. The physical environment was hard enough to break the strongest of men who were born and raised in the tropics. But there was also the work in the sulfur mine a thousand feet below the surface, where the prisoners toiled stripped to the waist sixteen hours a day. Those who were not broken by the climate usually died in the mine. By some miracle Jes-

sup managed to survive his years of imprisonment, and because he had, he swore an oath to do all in his power to better the lot of his people. In the years since he had returned to the sea farm he had dedicated himself to that single purpose.

"Is anything wrong?" Warren asked.

Jessup wiped his forehead with his arm. "Nothing," he said. "Nothing at all."

Warren replaced the letter opener on the desk. "The government is well aware of the problem," he said pompously, "but what you fail to realize is that society is structured a certain way."

"Oh, I know that!" Jessup exclaimed, "and at the very bottom of the pyramid, supporting the entire social structure, are the sea farmers."

The Civil Administrator snorted his disapproval. "I did not call you here to have a political, economic discussion," he said.

"I didn't think so," Jessup answered with a broad smile.

"Within the next few days a specialist is coming down here from the Institute of Marine Biology and Oceanography to investigate the reasons for lack of production."

"Is he going to investigate the problem from your office or will he waste his time by coming down to the Barbuda Station?"

"There is no need for you to take such a belligerent attitude."

"Who is he?" Jessup asked.

"Dr. Robert Wilde," Warren answered.

Jessup laughed derisively. "Another dud!"

"Your attitude could hardly be called respectful," Warren said. "From the information I have received on Dr. Wilde, he did part of his doctoral research work at the Caribbean Sea Farm some fifteen years ago."

Jessup's brow furrowed. The name suddenly began to have meaning for him. It was almost fifteen years ago that he had been sentenced to the Kiska Island penal camp. Much of what had happened to him just before he was imprisoned had been misted over by the three years of hard labor on Kiska.

"Do you know that man?" Warren questioned.

"I might," Jessup answered, "but I won't know until I meet him and I have great doubts that he will take the trouble to come out to the sea farm."

"That will be all," the Civil Administrator said.

Jessup made no move to leave.

"I don't think there is anything else that we have to discuss," Warren said.

"There is," Jessup said. "No matter what Dr. Wilde finds, I am telling you again that the sea farmers did not sabotage the harvest."

"That remains to be seen," Warren answered.

Jessup stood up. He took a deep breath. "Tell your chief at the Civil Administration Center that if the food allotment of the sea farmers is cut below what it is, the men will not go to sea again."

Warren's face turned crimson. "Am I to understand that you are threatening the government?"

"Yes."

"I thought you came here too willingly," Warren said.

"It seems," Jessup answered, "that each of us had something to tell the other." He stood up and without waiting for Warren to say another word, he started for the door, which was already sliding open as he approached it.

VI

Jessup paused on the steps of the Civil Administration Building and wiped his sweaty palms on his pants. He was well aware of the drastic step he had just taken. To threaten the government was an act of treason but to allow the authorities to further reduce the food allotment for his people would certainly cause starvation. He also knew that he had placed himself in great personal danger and even though he was the unacknowledged leader of the sea farmers he was not immune to arrest, trial and imprisonment. The thought of being sent back to Kiska made him shudder. If that should happen, he was sure he would not survive. It was an ugly prospect but he could not let it interfere with his work. What happened to him was of little consequence. What mattered was that his people would be given the rights and opportunities that the rest of the citizens had. Even if he wanted to, there was no way he could retract what he had told Warren.

He shrugged his shoulders, pulled the brim of his straw hat over his eyes to shield them from the glare of the sun and started down the steps. As he reached the path that led to the pier where the hydrofoil *Sailfish II* was waiting to take him back to Barbuda, he saw Warren's secretary. She was seated on a stone

bench in the shade of a broadleaf palm tree looking up at him as though she didn't believe what she saw.

Jessup met her gaze frankly. Outside the office she didn't look so birdlike. In fact, she was rather pretty in a bland sort of way and though she was not endowed with the kind of figure that would make her a candidate for intense sexual admiration, she was endowed with sufficient womanly attributes to enable a man to acknowledge her womanhood.

She flushed under his bold examination: "I didn't mean to stare at you," she said apologetically.

Jessup left the path and stood before her. He pushed his straw hat back on his head and said, "What did you hope to see? My horns?"

"I told you I was sorry," she answered, lowering her eyes.

She suddenly reminded Jessup of a white statue he had seen in the Art Institute Museum years before. The naked figure of a woman carved out of rock, with small breasts, a flat hard stomach, almost girlish hips and slender thighs but so completely erotic that he was forced to reach out and run his hand over the smooth, cold marble. He imagined that if the woman seated in front of him were naked, she would look like the statue he had seen.

She raised her eyes and a pink glow suffused her white skin.

"Now it is I who should apologize for staring," he said in a gentle voice.

She smiled. "Are we even?"

Jessup nodded and asked, "What are you doing out here?"

He had left Warren's office so quickly that when

he passed through the anteroom he had not bothered to look toward the secretary's desk. His one thought was to get out of the air-conditioned building and into the warm sunlight where the air had the clean, fresh scent of the sea about it.

"I usually come out here," she told him, "during lunch time. That is, if it's not raining."

Jessup glanced toward the hydrofoil. The crew must have seen him because the craft's engines were already throbbing.

"Please don't let me keep you," she said, glancing at the hydrofoil, then back at him.

"They will wait."

"It's almost time for me to return to the office," she said.

Jessup stepped back to allow her to stand. He wanted to continue to speak to her but was unable to think of something else to say.

"You know, Mr. Coombs," she said, "Mr. Warren is only carrying out his orders. He is not as terribly rigid as he would like people to believe." She lowered her voice. "In fact," she told him, "he has on more than one occasion mentioned to me that the government should not continue to ignore the demands of the sea farmers and that was before the trouble about the harvests started."

Jessup could feel the skin on his back crawl. Had she been sent to tell him that? Had he foolishly believed her story about spending her lunch period outside? The possibility that he had been duped angered him and he said, "You may tell Mr. Warren that I appreciate his concern and I would be even more

appreciative if he would change some of the feeling into actions that would help my people."

"I shouldn't have mentioned it," she said. "I must go back." She turned and started to walk away.

Jessup reached out, grabbed hold of her arm and brought her around to face him again.

A small wordless cry escaped from her lips. Her eyes were wide with fear. "You're hurting me," she said in a tremulous whisper.

He let go of her. "I didn't mean to be angry," he explained, "but—" He was about to tell her a lecture on the government's policy toward the sea farmers but he stopped himself and said instead, "Would you tell me your name so I can address you properly?"

"Deidre," she said. "Deidre Boyce."

Jessup took hold of her hand and smiled broadly. "You already know who I am," he said.

"Mr. Coombs."

"Jessup," he said, "everyone calls me by my first name."

She said his name and smiled.

"When I come here again," he told her, "perhaps I'll have more time to speak to you."

"I'd like that," she said. "But now I must go."

Jessup looked toward the hydrofoil. "I better not keep them waiting too much longer or they might decide to leave without me."

"But you said they'd wait," Deidre teased with an impish smile.

"Every man loses patience after a while, even the sea farmers."

She looked up at him.

Jessup was not aware of the double meaning of his remark until he saw the sad expression on her face, but he knew he had meant it. "Until next time," he said, taking hold of her hand again.

"Yes," she answered.

He let go of her, turned and headed for the hydrofoil at a trot. As soon as he leaped aboard the stern he ordered the lines to be cast off, and only when the craft was away from the pier and almost out in the main channel did he look back toward the Civil Administration Building to see if Deidre was still there. She was.

"You could keep her in sight a long time," one of the crewmen said, "if you use the electro-optical system."

Jessup pretended not to know what the man was talking about, much to the amusement of everyone aboard. As soon as the *Sailfish II* was out on the open water Jessup activated the skim-switch and at the same time changed from nuclear sea-drive to air-jet power. As the speed of the craft increased, the entire hull rose slowly out of the water.

"Maximum cruising speed," a crew member said. "One hundred and fifty knots. Foil struts hydraulically locked."

"Set course for Barbuda," Jessup ordered.

"Course set."

Jessup set the control from manual to the automatic pilot and went below to discuss what had taken place between himself and Warren with several of the sea farmers who were overseers at the various stations that made up the Caribbean Sea Farm.

The men listened to Jessup without attempting to interrupt him. There were six of them around the table. One, Peter Haggard, was nearing seventy-five, but his body was strong and his mind alert. He was the only one of the group who was recognized by the government as the official spokesman for the sea farmers. The others ranged in age from twenty-seven to fifty-five and, like Jessup, they had no official standing. All of them were lean, hard-looking men, who had spent most of their life wresting food from the sea. Their faces were expressionless.

"The government," Jessup explained, "still believes that we sabotaged the harvests."

"Why would we do something like that?" one of the men asked, "when we'd be the first to suffer? It seems to me like they're trying to hurt us."

The others grunted their agreement and looked toward Jessup for an answer.

"I told Mr. Warren," Jessup said, "that we would not put to sea again if our food allotment is further reduced because the next harvest is below official estimates."

The men spoke excitedly to each other. Jessup could sense their fear and doubts. Then he was openly challenged by Munsey, a chunkily built man with a barrel-like chest and a reputation for resenting Jessup's position of leadership on the grounds that he was not consulted about it.

"You had no right to say that," he said. "Now we have openly declared ourselves to be against them." He turned from Jessup and spoke to the other men. "Jessup here isn't married. He does not have children. He has no family to worry about. He can afford to

do what he pleases, say what he wants. But those of us with responsibility cannot take the same path, unless we are willing to risk not only our own lives but the lives of our families." When he finished, Munsey was red in the face and breathing hard. He sat down and glowered at Jessup.

Several others voiced their agreement with what he had just said.

"You told me that I was to use my own judgment—"

"Judgment!" shouted Munsey. "We told you to use judgment, not foolishness." He was on his feet. "We do not need foolishness from our own kind. The government has enough of it, but we have given them a good reason to suspect *us* now!"

Jessup silently eyed Munsey until he had forced him to look away and sit down. "We are being accused of something of which we are innocent," he said. "If we allow this accusation to go unchallenged there will be others, and as we are being punished right this moment for something of which we are not guilty, then what will prevent them from penalizing us for crimes we did not commit?"

"That is the way it has always been," Peter said.

"Then I say it is time to change it," Jessup said so harshly that the sound of his voice jolted the men at the table. "For years now we have been trying to get the government to change its policies toward us, give us the same rights as other citizens and they have turned a deaf ear to our needs. But now something has happened which suddenly has put us in a remarkable position."

Even as Jessup paused for breath, the man who

took exception before was on his feet again. "By threatening them," he said hotly, "you have proved our guilt."

"No!" Jessup shouted, losing his patience. "We know that we had nothing to do with what has happened in the sea."

"That makes no difference," answered his antagonist. "They will believe whatever is convenient for them to believe." Then he addressed the others. "I have told you time and time again that Jessup is too headstrong for the role he has chosen to take and we have encouraged him to pursue. We must inform the Civil Administrator that Jessup did not have the authority to speak on our behalf." He turned to Jessup. His voice softened. "We all know what you want is right. We know that you have over these many years worked for us. But this time," he said, changing his voice to a harsher note, "you have let your own passions come before the welfare of your people."

"Is that the way the rest of you men feel?" Jessup asked.

His question was met with silence.

"Do what you will!" Jessup said angrily. Then as he turned to leave the cabin, he stopped and faced the men at the table. "The government is sending Dr. Robert Wilde to investigate the situation." He quickly left the cabin and went to the bridge.

Jessup stood near the window and silently looked out at the sea. Overhead the sky was an intense blue; off to the starboard huge cumulus clouds hung on the horizon. Because of the speed of the hydrofoil, Jessup could not tell which way the clouds were mov-

ing. He automatically asked a crew member for a radar fix on them.

"Speed twelve knots. Range eighteen miles. Course two-hundred forty degrees."

Jessup was satisfied that they were heading away from the sea farms. Cumulus clouds were more often than not a sign of intense thunderstorm activity which could rush down on what had just minutes before been a calm sea and force the men to fight for their lives in a raging sea.

"There's a squall line extending out from the clouds," the crewman said. "Radar shows it to be about ten miles from the center."

"Better call weather warning and tell them, just in case they haven't picked them up," Jessup said. He continued to look at the cloud mass for a moment longer; then he turned his attention to the turquoise sea about him.

Even when he was just a boy Jessup would turn to the sea whenever he was angry or something bothered him. Then he lived on the island of Antigua and he would go to some remote cove on the southern coast and look out at the calm beauty of the sea. Sometimes he would dive off the high rocks or swim out of the coral reefs and lose himself in the splendor of what he saw though more often than not he would just sit and look out over the gentle undulating water.

But now he was a man and could not afford the luxury of anger. By leaving the meeting, he had renounced his leadership, at least for the time being. What really irked him was that he had failed to gain the support of the men in whom he had placed his

trust. He had counted on them. Perhaps he had hoped for too much.

After all, Munsey had correctly pointed out that Jessup had no family, nothing more than his life to lose, but if that was all a man had, then it was of some value. He wondered if Munsey had ever taken the time to think about the reason why he had never married? It wasn't that he did not want a wife, children and a home of his own. But the three years he had spent on Kiska gave him a more important purpose than to seek the emotional ties that come with marriage and children. Had he a family, perhaps he too might have reacted as the others to what Munsey had said.

Jessup took a deep breath and slowly exhaled. He was beginning to feel better. He cared little about having the position of leadership. The most important thing for him was to make sure that the people were not mistreated. He would serve that end, however, and wherever it was possible.

Jessup continued to watch the sea. Soon Antigua would appear off the port side and he would resume manual control of the craft. Quite suddenly he wondered if Deidre would enjoy a trip in the hydrofoil? That he bothered to think about her surprised him. She surely wasn't the kind of woman he took his pleasure with. Jessup liked more robust women.

"Antigua on the radar," a crewman called.

Jessup left off thinking about Deidre and devoted his attention to the task of resuming manual control of the *Sailfish II*.

He found it difficult to imagine her in the violent throes of passion.

VII

"THE PROCESS of transferring information from a man-made memory bank to a man's brain," explained Mr. Wong, "is really a very simple process. Here at the Government Information Center we have managed to reduce our language to a series of microsecond impulses. From these electrical letters we form words and sentences which are then electromagnetically introduced into the memory portion of the brain."

Robert couldn't help smiling. It wasn't what Wong had said that was humorous, but Wong was a caricature of a man, like something out of a book by that ancient English author Charles Dickens.

Wong was short with a protruding paunch, a moon face, dark, twinkling eyes and a button nose. His lips were thin and his jaw slanted back.

Even his office was decidedly different from most government offices. It was in the east wing of the building on the nineteenth floor. The walls were cluttered with bookshelves, the huge desk behind which Wong sat covered with all sorts of papers and books.

Robert wondered how Mr. Wong could ever find what he was looking for in the mass of disorganized material that was scattered all over the room. But for

all his apparent chaos, Mr. Wong was neatly dressed in the official uniform for his branch of service.

Mr. Wong said, "Please forgive me, but I always give a prospective customer an explanation of how the process works."

"I'm glad you did," Robert answered. "It makes me feel as though I am sharing something with you."

"Why, that's wonderful!" Wong exclaimed. "For men to share anything, even a dry technical explanation, is a great human experience."

Robert nodded his agreement and looked around the office for some signs of the electrical device that would impart an encyclopedic knowledge of the Caribbean area to his brain.

"The equipment," Mr. Wong said, "is not in this pandemonium of books and papers." He laughed and his stomach bounced up and down. "Dear me, now, if it were it would probably get lost under the books and papers."

Robert liked Mr. Wong. He felt comfortable with him. Maybe it was because he was a flesh-and-blood human being and not a disembodied voice.

"Shall we begin?" Mr. Wong questioned.

"Yes," Robert replied. He waited until Wong stood up before he did and then he followed him out of the office and into the corridor.

"This way," Wong said, opening a door a short distance from his office.

This room was very different from Wong's office. It was painted white. Almost in the center of the room was a table. Along the rear wall were several banks of electronic equipment. "I am sorry," Wong said, "that the actual work must be done in such a

hospital-like atmosphere, but the equipment is very delicate and must be kept at a constant temperature and free from contamination." He pointed toward the door. "As soon as it is opened, a special dust-collecting device is automatically switched into operation. When the room is absolutely dust-free a green light will flash next to the one that is red."

"And I thought you were concerned about your customers," Robert quipped.

Wong laughed. Then he said, "Preliminary to the electromagnetic induction process, you must be in a totally relaxed state. I want you to remove your shoes and jacket. You may place them in there." As he spoke a section of the side wall opened. "If you have any metal objects in your trouser pockets, please remove them."

Robert followed Wong's directions and then returned to the table. Wong had moved toward the banks of equipment and was busy turning dials and positioning switches. The red light that had been on was now off and the green one was on.

"You are to drink this," Wong said, handing Robert a paper cup half filled with a colorless liquid.

He could not see where the cup or the liquid came from.

Wong seemed to sense his curiosity and said, "Everything that is needed for the process is contained in the equipment and is dispensed at the proper time."

Robert drank. The liquid seemed to have no taste at all but there was a distinct aftertaste, something like licorice. It was not at all unpleasant.

Wong took the empty cup and told Robert to lie

down on the table. "Built into the surface of the table," Wong said, "are sensing devices which record the usual body functions such as blood pressure, heartbeat and temperature." He walked back to the consoles along the rear wall. "But it also records a great many other things."

Robert could hear Wong but wasn't the slightest bit interested in what he was saying. He could almost feel the tension seep out of his body and leave him at peace.

Wong was still talking but it was no longer to him. He tried to move his head but found the effort too great. To whom was Wong speaking? Robert listened for a name. He heard it. Zahn? Who was he? What was he? Two very blurry faces appeared bending over him. He didn't like the way they looked, and he closed his eyes to shut them out. Cocooned in his self-induced darkness he was comfortable. It enabled him to create a better world than that in which he lived.

"He looks like he's asleep," Zahn said, moving back from Robert's face.

Wong smiled and said, "Let me assure you he is not. He has withdrawn into that inner world of perfection that all men have. Of course, in Dr. Wilde's case it is quite unique since he possesses an extraordinary imagination. If you wish I could show you what he is consciously thinking about."

Zahn was sorely tempted to accept Wong's offer but the business at hand prevailed over his curiosity. "Perhaps some other time," he said. "But now I am much more interested in providing Dr. Wilde with the necessary information."

"As you wish," Wong answered with a shrug. "The facts that will be fed into the doctor's memory have been divided into three categories: geographical, historical and economic."

Zahn paced back and forth in front of the table. "Have you included the necessary political information?" he questioned. He stopped to look at Wong.

"Yes. But rather than treat the political aspects of the region separately, I thought it wiser to introduce them more subtly as part of the other groupings. That way they will not blatantly stand out but will be correlated with other material."

Zahn smiled.

"I see that you approve," Wong said.

"It is too late to do anything but approve," Zahn replied.

Wong went to one of the consoles and began manipulating the controls. "I am measuring the various areas of Dr. Wilde's memory," he said. "Our research has shown that a man's memory is divided into three zones that rest one above the other like layers of geological ages. The deepest one is totally useless to us since it contains the most primitive of man's memory and hardly ever comes into use."

"And the other two?" Zahn questioned.

Wong did not answer. He was intently studying an automatic readout device which was developing a series of odd-shaped drawings on a grid-like screen.

Zahn joined him at the console.

"This heart-shaped figure," Wong said, "is the exact configuration of Dr. Wilde's second memory stratum." He turned from the screen to Zahn. "It is larger than that of the average individual, as might be

expected with a man of his highly developed and intense feelings of individualism."

Zahn nodded but he was growing impatient. Still, he knew that he must not hurry Wong and there was most probably a very good reason why he was taking time to explain things. But he dearly wished that Wong would quickly make whatever point he was leading up to and be done with it.

"The other image on the screen," Wong said, and pointed to a green phosphorescent shape that looked very much like a flattened dome, "is the first layer or the most recent one and therefore the area which we will use. It too shows a significantly higher type of development than usual."

"But what has all this to do with—"

Wong remained unperturbed and in the flat tone he had just used said, "I do not mean to cut you short but there are things which you must understand about Dr. Wilde." And he glanced significantly toward the table.

Zahn nodded. "Go ahead," he told him.

"The electrical energy which forms a man's memory is not much different from the electrical impulses which constitute his normal thinking processes but there is a significant difference, especially in a man of Dr. Wilde's type. He is an extremely disciplined man, given not only to scientific logic but to a great deal of what the people at the Psychological Institute refer to as morbid intellectualization of ideas. This sometimes happens when a man comes into direct conflict with authority. He uses the only weapon he has at his command to combat the forces which threaten him.

"You mean," Zahn said, "that he tried to out-think them?"

"Yes."

"But you know that is impossible," Zahn answered. "It is precisely because he believes that he has succeeded in doing this that he was chosen for the assignment. You knew that weeks ago," Zahn said.

Wong nodded. "Please listen," he replied. "When a man consciously thinks, his thoughts are in terms of a very real frame of reference, no matter whether he is thinking about eating or attempting to develop a mathematical equation. But when the memory comes into an active state, this frame of reference may or may not be activated. If it is not activated, then whatever he recalls will affect him much the same way as when you or I happen to recall a melody of a song or a word but cannot remember where it comes from or why we should remember it at all.

"But that would destroy our purpose!" Zahn exclaimed.

"If on the other hand," Wong continued calmly, "the frame of reference was activated, then he would either accept or reject the memory. His acceptance would depend on whether or not it met and passed the test so to speak of his particular frame of reference."

"And how do we know that?" Zahn asked. He was now thoroughly angered by the ease with which Wong had pulled the keystone out of his elaborate plan.

"We don't," Wong answered. "And with Dr. Wilde I would say that the very best you could hope for is that despite his unique individualistic drives, he

both consciously and unconsciously respects law and order and that by nature he is not a man of violence, though if pushed far enough, he will, like any other animal, react by answering violence with violence. I would say that Dr. Wilde offers a fifty percent chance of fulfilling your particular requirements.

"Why wasn't I told about this by the Psychological Institute?" Zahn demanded.

Wong smiled. "Isn't it the same old story of the right hand not really knowing what the left one is doing?" Wong questioned. "I am sure that here in the Information Center we have a great deal of information," he said with a knowing smile that he had made a play on words, "that the Psychological Institute would find very helpful, and of course the opposite holds true." He shrugged. "But they hold themselves aloof because they treat the illness of the mind, while we here only appear to be interested in making man's mind more useful to the State."

"I am not interested in your petty squabbles," Zahn said tersely. "Fifty percent chance of success is better than none. Go ahead and start the information transfer. Wait! Is there any way to block out his own frame of reference and insert an artificial one?"

"That is a project I am currently working on," Wong said. "In fact, I was going to ask you to provide a certain number of individuals for my experiments."

"You shall have them."

Wong turned his attention to the console. He began setting control dials and positioning switches. "At this point it is absolutely necessary to establish those memory impulses that have been stored for the

last twenty-four hours. If you watch that large screen directly in the center of the room you will actually see images of what he has recorded in his memory."

Zahn looked at the screen. In a few moments it was flooded with a great deal of what seemed to be interference.

"He does not want to remember," Wong said.

"Will he?"

"Yes, but it will cause him great pain. Look at the way he is twisting and turning on the table. If it were not for the force-field, he would have rolled off and fallen."

Zahn glanced at Wilde but immediately returned his attention to the screen. Spellbound, he watched the sequence between Robert and Marion and then followed Robert's flight to the city and finally his lovemaking with the young woman who was secretary to the Director of the Institute of Marine Biology and Oceanography; but he had known about that since she was one of his agents and had contacted the security police immediately after Robert had phoned her. When images faded from the screen Zahn faced Wong again.

"It was necessary to see how cluttered that past twenty-four-hour period was, since I intend to place some of the information on the Caribbean within that most recent time span. Poor man did not even look as though he was enjoying himself with the young lady. By the way, is she generally available?"

"Yes. Now will you get on with it!"

Wong smiled. "It has already begun," he said.

VIII

For the next three days Robert spent the better part of each afternoon with Wong. The experience of having his memory pumped full of information electronically was exhilarating and he found himself responding to Wong in the rather unique condition of a friend. Several times Wong had hinted that he knew what the real problem was in the Caribbean area but Robert declined to engage in any conversation on the matter.

When Robert was not occupied at the Government Information Center, he spent an hour or two each day at his desk in the Institute checking bits and pieces of information that had been fed to him by Wong. He soon realized that it was not comprehensive. Though he was absolutely sure that no living man knew as much as he did about the Caribbean, he had the unsettling feeling that something had been left out.

Robert spent each night with the Director's secretary. He gorged himself on the pleasures she so easily gave and though he had absolutely no emotional feeling for her, he responded to her sexually with a voraciousness that even astounded him.

The day before he was scheduled to leave he spent the morning at his apartment packing some of the

things he wanted to take with him. As he packed Marion stayed out of the bedroom. Neither of them made any attempt to speak to the other. Robert took nothing that would remind him of his marriage except a photograph of his son.

When he finished packing he went into the living room. Marion was standing by the window. She was dressed in a pair of tight-fitting blue shorts that were more like panties and a halter. Though her figure showed no signs of her pregnancy, her breasts seemed fuller.

He set his travel-pack down and asked her how she was feeling.

"I am well," she answered without looking at him.

"Is John here?" Robert asked.

"He is in his bedroom," she said.

Robert started for his son's room.

"He doesn't want to see you," Marion said.

Robert stopped and faced her.

"I told him you were coming after you called but he said that he doesn't want to see you."

For a brief moment Robert was going to insist that he see John, but he quickly realized that by acting that way he would only make things worse than they already were. "Tell him," he said to Marion, "that I love him very much."

She nodded.

"I will write to him," he said and looked questioningly at her.

"He will get your letters," she answered.

"Thank you."

Marion turned away from him.

"We did have some good years," he said softly.

Marion remained silent and motionless.

Robert looked down at his travel-pack and then at his wife. He suddenly realized that the shorts and halter she wore was the working costume of the women in the Sex Centers who had no standing or rights within the Center and were required to be partners for any male above the age of fifteen or female above the age of eighteen. When he remembered that he had loved her, his throat tightened.

"What are you staring at?" she asked, suddenly facing him.

He took a deep breath and slowly exhaled. "Nothing," he answered. He reached down for his travel-pack and went to the door of the apartment. He wanted to say something to her but he could think of nothing. He let himself out of the apartment and slowly closed the door.

Robert went straight to the secretary's apartment and waited for her to return from the Institute. When she did, he bluntly told her to undress and then he took her violently and quickly. Afterwards he fell asleep and, though he dreamed of John and Marion, they quickly vanished and their place was taken by the low whisper of a man's voice telling him that it was up to him to save the people of the world from starvation.

"But what can I do?" Robert questioned.

"You must find proof."

"Of what?"

"The sea farmers must not be allowed to conquer the world. They will destroy all that has been built over the many centuries of World Government."

"Absurd!" Robert answered.

"We have devised the best social system. You must not let those on the bottom become the top."

"I will find the truth!"

"That is not enough."

"It is always enough."

"No."

"I do not understand," Robert said.

"The truth must be altered so that it coexists with what is best for all."

"Truth is absolute."

"Nothing is absolute. Remember the world lies in your hands. Think how strong, how powerful you are —Dr. Robert Wilde, the man who changed the destiny of the world."

The voice faded but Robert answered, "I cannot even change my own destiny; how then should I undertake to change history?" He bolted up from the bed.

Through the open door of the bedroom he could see into the kitchen. His sex partner was still naked. He ran his hand across his brow. It was wet with perspiration. He recalled the dream. Slowly he lay back and thought about it. The absurdity of it was obvious, but then he remembered his last word: history. In a sudden flash of insight Robert understood why he had sensed gaps in the information that had been fed to him. He knew Wong had interspersed political ideas and motivations between memory patterns of technical and historical information.

Robert smiled. It was like the old game of chess he played with his counselor at the Psychological Institute, only this time they had put their moves inside

of him. He wondered if he would be keen enough to recognize them before they forced him to do their will.

The woman returned to the bedroom. "You look pleased," she said.

"I am."

"With me, I hope?"

He reached up and touched her naked breasts. "Yes," he answered slowly. "Having you these past four days has been most gratifying."

She laughed. "Could I have that in writing?" she asked.

"Why? Do you need proof of your ability to give a man pleasure?"

"No."

"I didn't really think so," he said. "Tell me," he asked, "how long have you been engaged in this sort of work?" It was the first time he had ever asked her a directly personal question.

"Since my sixteenth year," she answered, slipping down on the bed next to him.

"Where will you go after I leave?"

"I'll remain at the Institute," she answered.

"That's not what I meant."

"Oh!" she exclaimed. "We are not permitted to tell—"

"I'm sorry I asked," Robert said quickly.

"Let's just enjoy ourselves," she told him and was already busy caressing him.

Robert allowed his body to respond to her artful manipulations and when he finally embraced her he could feel her respond to his steady rhythm. He could

tell that she was not feigning her reaction and when he finally exploded she was caught in her own spasm of ecstasy.

"What time do you leave tomorrow?" she asked after a while.

"Ten in the morning."

She was silent.

"Will you be able to see me off?" he asked.

"I'm afraid not."

"Perhaps when I return we will be able to get together," he suggested.

"Yes. I would like that."

Robert touched her cheek with his hand.

"You're a very gentle man," she whispered, almost as though she were afraid to tell him. "Even in your violence you are gentle."

"Thank you," he answered and for a fleeting moment thought about Marion. Then he turned to the woman and kissed her lips.

IX

On the day that Robert arrived in Ponce and was immediately driven from the airport to the Civil Administration Building where he met Mr. Warren, the Civil Administrator, Jessup Coombs was patroling the underwater passageway between the Windward and Leeward Islands.

"From what I was able to find out," Warren explained to Robert, "this is a deep canyon through which a great many of our larger fish move as they migrate from their feeding grounds off the northern coast of South America to an area several hundred miles to the West of Martinique to prepare for the spawning season."

Robert was almost immediately aware of the undersea geography of the canyon and the species of fish involved. "They seek a particular condition of salinity and water temperature," he answered.

Warren nodded.

"What caused him to patrol the canyon?"

"Several large schools of sharks were noted in the vicinity yesterday morning," Warren explained. "Ordinarily we keep the sharks well in hand and they behave like most decent fish but these seem to be the renegade type. They bolted their regular pack and became killers." He sighed. "You never really know

about primitives! For years there is no trouble with them and then in a flick of an eyelash they revert to type."

Robert knew that one large male who suddenly lusted for blood could communicate this frenzy to those nearby and then like a chain reaction the entire school would turn killer. "How many are in the pack?" he asked.

"Ten, maybe twenty."

"Mr. Combs has his work cut out for him, at least for the next few hours."

"Yes," Warren answered. "He may have to kill all of them."

"Does he know that I am here?"

"I sent a message to him as soon as your plane landed. I have a hovercraft standing by to pick him up as soon as he returns to the mother ship."

"The sooner we solve this problem," Robert said, "the better it will be for all concerned."

Warren agreed. "I understand that this is not your first visit to the sea farm."

"My last was fifteen years ago," Robert told him. "I imagine a great deal has changed."

"Technologically," Warren said. "But the sea farmers will always be the sea farmers."

Robert wasn't quite sure how to interpret the Civil Administrator's last comment. He waited for him to elaborate but he didn't. Instead he ran his hand through his white hair and casually mentioned the fact that the hurricane season was close upon them and that he had provided quarters for him and a female companion whenever he should want one.

"I will not stay here," Robert said, "but thank you just the same."

Warren looked sharply at the visitor from the mainland. "No doubt then," he said, "you intend to go down to the Barbuda Station?"

"And some of the others if my work demands it," Robert answered.

"Ordinarily the sea farmers do not welcome strangers," Warren explained. "And now, since conditions have become even more difficult than usual, I would be unable to guarantee your safety."

"I asked for no such guarantee," Robert answered. "I am sure that they will understand that I have come to help them."

"Or hurt them, if you should find that they are indeed responsible for the poor harvest," Warren said.

"Yes," Robert answered after a moment's pause. "But then only the guilty would be punished. I don't think that all of them could have been involved."

Warren gestured. "Of course I cannot stop you," he said, "and I will give you all the cooperation I possibly can."

"Thank you," Robert answered.

"I think I had better tell you this right off," the Civil Administrator said. He stood up and walked to the large window which overlooked the harbor and, farther out, the turquoise calm of the Caribbean. "Jessup was here just a few days ago and on the way back to the Barbuda Station he and Munsey had a falling out."

"Who is Munsey?" Robert asked.

"One of the overseers," Warren said. Then he went on to explain that Jessup had lodged a threat against the government. "It was over this that they argued. Jessup left the meeting and thereby surrendered his leadership to Munsey, or at least so it would seem."

"Then if Jessup is no longer the leader, why did you summon him here?" Robert asked.

Warren turned from the window. "It would be unwise for me to reveal the fact that I know what takes place among them."

"An informer?"

Warren smiled. "I prefer to call it a source of information," he said.

"And the threat?"

"It was relayed to higher authorities," Warren said.

"Then Coombs will be taken, I suppose?"

"Not for the time being," Warren told him. "Much depends on what your work shows."

"He was foolish to threaten the government."

"Very foolish indeed," Warren said. He crossed the room and stood close to the chair where Robert was seated. "The man is an extremely likable person, only he does not understand the government cannot afford to treat the sea farmers like other citizens. Perhaps in fifty years from now a man like Jessup would also be allowed the benefits of reorientation and then he would be a useful member of society just the way we are."

"Do you really think something like that could happen?" Robert questioned. He decided that since he was not going to spend much time with the Civil

Administrator he might as well play chess with him too.

"I have already advanced such recommendations to the Council of Five."

"Then you must have some feeling for these people?"

"I understand them," Warren replied. "But we can discuss them at lunch. Come along. Perhaps Miss Boyce would join us. She's my secretary and she has taken quite a fancy to Jessup."

Robert smiled but said nothing.

X

JESSUP DID not attempt to go after the renegade sharks alone. Munsey was with him and so was a young man who just a week before had been duly elected to the rank of a full-fledged sea farmer. Each man operated a small, electric powered sub-scout, which had a maximum operating depth of one hundred fathoms and a cruising time radius of twenty knots for four hours.

The passageway between the two feeding grounds was thirty miles long and in places no more than fifty feet across but it was very deep, almost a hundred fathoms and terribly narrow. It was as though some huge plow had furrowed the ocean floor.

Jessup was in constant communication with Munsey and the other young man. He seldom spoke to the ship and all those aboard her knew him well enough not to speak to him unless it was absolutely necessary. Jessup was busy giving directions to the younger man of the threesome when the amber light on his control panel flashed. He swore under his breath but opened the switch to receive the signal from the mother ship.

"This is mother ship to baby. How do you read me?"

"Loud and clear."

"You are ordered to report to the Civil Administrator's office as soon as your mission is complete. Hovercraft standing by to transport you."

"Baby one out!" Jessup snapped and flicked off radio contact between himself and the mother ship. The message meant nothing to him and he would not permit himself to think about it until his mission was completed. He glanced around him. The water was a delicate shade of blue. He looked at his depth gauge. He was thirty feet below the surface. "All right," he said, going back to communicating with Munsey and Dugan. "Once we locate the pack, we'll try to use a high-intensity sonic beam with a sixty-degree spread. Maybe we can force them out into the open sea. If we can, Munsey and I will go in and try to stun them with a few jolts of 100KW."

Munsey's laughter boomed over the communication's hookup. "Man, if that doesn't work, we'll sure have a fight on our hands. Those beasts don't like being rattled by electric charges."

Jessup smiled. "It will give junior a real taste of riding herd on the sea," Jessup said.

"Don't you worry about me," Dugan piped back.

"Listen to him!" Munsey said.

"I'm going down to ten fathoms," Jessup said. "Lucky for us sharks are surface fish, otherwise we'd have to play hide and seek deep down in the trench." He pushed forward on his control stick. The blue light about him became dimmer and dimmer until at ten fathoms it seemed more like a thin blue haze, like the kind that hangs over the sea just before sunset or sunrise. He switched on a powerful searchlight. Instantly the water around his glass bubble was alive

with all sorts of curious sea beings. He had descended twenty feet into the canyon and was about ten feet from the wall. A huge moray eel slithered out from behind two huge boulders and rushed at the subscout. Its vicious jaws clamped shut on a protruding antenna just alongside the bubble.

"I have a visitor," Jessup told the others. "A moray just attempted to bite off my antenna."

Munsey laughed.

"We're looking at each other straight in the eye," Jessup reported. "I think he must have broken a few teeth. He doesn't seem very happy about his choice of food. My, my, the fellow is beginning to wiggle. I think I'll really worry him." Jessup activated the mechanical hand and guided it toward the eel. Quickly he set the fingers in motion and grabbed hold of the eel's snout. "I've got him by the nose. He's let go of the antenna and is snapping at the mechanical hand."

"Stop playing down there," Munsey said, but there was no anger in his voice.

"One trounce on the head. There!" Jessup exclaimed. "Mr. Moray has lost heart. He's going back to his hole to wait for more cooperative food."

"Have something on my scanner," Dugan said. "Bearing eighty-four degrees, moving at five knots, depth seven fathoms."

Jessup oriented his scanner to the heading and depth he had just been given. "It's them," he said. "Munsey, take the intermediate position. I'll stay low." He told Dugan to take the top position. "Stay at ten fathoms." He waited until his teammates were in position and then he ordered them to activate their

sonic beams. "Now," he said, "let's move in on them."

The sharks were advancing down the channel. There were at least thirty of them. They were huge.

Then the beams took effect. The sharks halted their advance down the canyon and were milling about; suddenly one huge gray body hurled itself against the combined beam only to hurtle upward toward the surface and come twisting down into a kind of somersault. One after another they charged the beam. The water churned wildly around the thrashing bodies.

"Increase sonic intensity by a factor of ten," Jessup ordered.

The sharks began to back away; then suddenly they turned and rushed back toward the open sea.

"Munsey," Jessup called, "here we go!" He pushed his control throttle forward. The sub-scout lurched forward and was off. Jessup was just above him. "Where's junior?"

"Just behind you!"

"Make sure you stay there," Jessup said.

He and Munsey continued to follow the shark pack.

"They've stopped," Munsey said.

Jessup looked ahead of him. He was close enough to the surface so that the natural light filtered down into the water. The sharks were less than five hundred yards in front of him and he was closing on them very fast. "Better slow down," he said.

"Done," Munsey replied. "What's going on out there?"

"I don't know." He switched on his high-intensity optical scanner. "I see nothing on the optic," he said.

"Neither do I," Munsey reported. "I just see those sharks. They're big ones!"

"Dugan," Jessup called. "Take my place. I'm going to go in closer and have a look." He increased the speed of the sub-scout.

"In place," Dugan said.

"Keep your sonic beams activated," Jessup said. He moved within three hundred yards of the sharks. They were milling around as though they were trying to make up their minds about something. Then suddenly a large gray monster swung around and shot toward him at an incredible speed.

"Watch it!" Munsey warned.

"I see him," Jessup replied. He came straight for the sub-scout. His huge jaws were open. He flashed by and tried to crush the bubble between his jaws. At the same time Jessup released a full 10KW charge at the monster. The shark's body quivered, became rigid, and then relaxed; a moment later it rolled over. "He's out of action," Jessup said.

"The hell he is!" Dugan shouted.

"He's comin' at you from the rear."

Jessup felt the sub-scout jolt with the impact of the monster.

"He's got your propeller," Munsey said.

Jessup glanced behind him. The shark's eyes were on a level with his. They looked at him with blind fury. Using the enormous power in its muscular body, the shark was attempting to pull the sub-scout down. "This boy's got my blood on his mind," Jessup said.

"Can you manage him?" Munsey asked.

"Yes," Jessup answered. He hit the emergency button and instantly a rocket blasted out of the sub-

scout's stern. The shark was blown apart and the scout shot to within fifty yards of the rest of the sharks. Instantly he threw the reverse control and the scout began to move backward. He wiped his brow.

"Are you okay?" Munsey asked.

"Affirmative," Jessup answered. He ran a quick check on the sub-scout's controls. "Ship in order too." He halted when he had put five hundred yards between him and the shark pack.

"They're still milling around out there," Dugan said.

"I don't ever remember seeing anything like this before," Munsey commented.

"You're seeing it now," Jessup said. "Whatever is out there has them pinned between us and it." He turned on his optics again. "They're forming up for a charge."

"What?" Munsey yelled.

"Dugan," Jessup called, "get the hell out of here!"

"Nothing doing! You and Munsey are going to need all the help you can get."

"He's right, Jessup," Munsey said.

Jessup put the scout in to reverse. "We'll form a line," he said, "and try to hold them."

"Too late!" Munsey yelled.

The first sharks were already bearing down on Jessup. He used his high-voltage discharge but the sharks were so stimulated that it had no effect on them. They crashed against his scout with fantastic speed, rocking it from side to side. The first wave passed him and went on to attack Munsey and Dugan.

Another wave of five sharks came at Jessup.

"Munsey," Dugan called, "my propeller is out."

Jessup began to maneuver his scout as though he were flying a high-speed aircraft and engaged in a dogfight. "Munsey," he shouted. "How are you?"

"Holding up. What do you make of it?"

"I don't know," he said. "Better kill them or they'll kill us."

"Right!"

"Dugan?" Jessup called. "Can you maintain depth?"

"Will try."

Jessup killed three of the four sharks with electronically guided harpoons. He expected the others to turn on their dead and devour them in a pattern of frenzied feeding. They did not. They kept trying to break through the blockade that he, Munsey and Dugan had set up.

"There's more than twenty of them," Dugan said. "Here I go again. Got three of them."

"Dugan?" Jessup called.

"Can't hold depth."

"Blow your tanks. Surface!"

"Air control damaged!"

"Mother ship . . . mother ship," Jessup radioed. "This is baby one. Baby three is in trouble . . . execute emergency operations."

"Dugan?"

There was no answer. "Munsey, can you see Dugan?"

"Negative."

"Dugan?" Jessup shouted.

"Yes sir?"

"Goddamn it, answer when I call you!" Jessup said angrily. "Stand by for emergency help."

"No good."

"What the hell are you talking about?"

"Must abandon sub-scout. Bubble cracked.

"Where are you?"

"Fifty-five fathoms. Preparing to eject."

A low roar rose up from beneath Jessup and an instant later the concussion of the ejection charge bounced his ship. "I'm going down after him," he told Munsey. He dove straight down and switched on his searchlight. At fifty fathoms he saw what was left of Dugan. The rest of him was hanging out of the blood-washed jaws of a huge shark. "Dugan's dead," he told Munsey, and started back up. "We must stop these sharks."

"I'm trying," Munsey answered.

Jessup signaled the mother ship. "One casualty down here. Dugan is dead," he said.

"What about the sharks?" the operator asked.

"Going after them now," Jessup said. "Will have to kill them."

"Shall we send additional sub-scouts down?"

"What about it, Munsey?" Jessup asked.

"No sense risking more men."

"We will handle it," Jessup answered. "Over and out."

He brought his sub-scout on a line off the starboard beam of Munsey's craft and together they moved closer to the sharks. Again and again they were charged by the monsters and each time they managed to kill several of the attackers until the sea round them was filled with blood and pieces of fish and there were only six of the original pack left. These were too tired to put up a fight. Jessup and Munsey killed them without much difficulty.

When it was finally over, Jessup told Munsey that he was going to cruise out to sea for a few miles. "Maybe I can spot what it was that frightened the sharks more than we did."

"I'll tag along," Munsey answered.

"Okay."

Jessup searched the ocean in a semi-circle ten miles beyond the mouth of the canyon. There was nothing. He took several deep dives but spotted nothing unusual. "Let's go back to the mother ship," he said.

"That's fine with me," Munsey replied.

Jessup brought his sub-scout to just below two fathoms of water. From his bubble he could look up and see the blue sky and at the same time enjoy the wonderful world that lay just beneath the surface. Dugan's death bothered him, though in his years as a sea farmer he had seen many men die, either from the sea itself or from creatures who lived in its depths. He had often thought that because the sea farmer lived in such close proximity to death, he was somehow stronger for it.

The mother ship was in sight when he remembered he had been ordered to report to the Civil Administrator. He wondered if the order had anything to do with his threat. He decided that if it did he could do nothing about it. He would take whatever the consequences were and—

"Jessup?" Munsey called.

"Yes."

"I've been thinking about those sharks," Munsey told him. "I never saw anything like it before."

"Neither have I," Jessup answered.

"Maybe we missed something?"

"Could be, but I doubt it."

"I'm not going to get much sleep tonight," Munsey said.

Jessup didn't answer. He began to ease back on his control stick and slowly surfaced his sub-scout. By the time he was awash, the mother ship had already swung out the engaging hooks to take his craft aboard. He opened the bubble and left his cockpit to secure the lines from the mother ship to the bow and stern of his sub-scout. Then he gave the signal to lift him on board.

XI

The Civil Administrator, Miss Boyce and Robert went down to the landing area alongside the quay. Word of Jessup's encounter with the pack of renegade sharks reached them while they were still at lunch. Miss Boyce was visibly upset though she did her best to hide it. Warren suggested that they return to his office where they could follow what was happening by a direct radio hookup with the mother ship, which would in turn tie them into the channel used by the sub-scouts.

For almost an hour they listened to Jessup, Munsey and Dugan, and when Jessup was attacked by the first wave of sharks Miss Boyce looked as if she would swoon. Warren seemed to take no notice of his secretary's condition but when the hovercraft reported that it was on its approach path he asked her if she would like to join them and meet Jessup when he landed. She managed to whisper a *yes*.

The hovercraft came in from a due south direction and made a smooth landing. The cabin door was opened by a crewman and Jessup stepped out. The instant Robert saw him he remembered who he was. Though the passage of fifteen years had matured him, he still retained a ruggedness that comes from

long hours of physical labor. He wore a wide-brimmed straw hat low on his forehead, a pair of cheap, not-too-clean work pants and a faded blue short-sleeved work shirt open at the neck. At his right side hung his knife.

Jessup did not move. He looked first at Warren, then at Robert. If he remembered him, he gave no sign that he did. Finally his eyes went to Miss Boyce. They lingered on her for a while and there was just a hint of a smile on his lips. She faced him. Her eyes were wide, her lips slightly parted and her breasts rose and fell with uninhibited agitation.

Warren moved a few steps toward the hovercraft while Jessup finally moved from the door and toward the Civil Administrator. The two men shook hands and Warren pointed back toward Robert. Jessup nodded and immediately stepped around the Civil Administrator.

Robert was prepared to greet him but instead Jessup went to Miss Boyce. He stood directly in front of her and said, "It was nice of you to meet me."

She looked up at him and asked, "Are you all right?"

He smiled. "I might have a few black-and-blue marks," he said, "but I didn't have much time to examine myself." He pointed back to Warren. "I was aboard the hovercraft almost as soon as I reached the deck of the mother ship."

Miss Boyce suddenly flushed. "This is Dr. Robert Wilde," she said.

Jessup turned toward him but did not move.

"Hello," Robert said. He hoped Jessup would remember him.

"So you've come back?" Jessup said. "You said you would but I never believed you."

"I wasn't sure that you'd recognize me," Robert said.

A sly smile passed over Jessup's face. "When I was told that a Dr. Wilde was coming down here," he said, "I did not think it would be the same man I knew." He stepped away from Miss Boyce and offered his hand. "I'm glad it's you," he said.

Robert shook his hand. He did not recall ever telling Jessup or anyone else that he would someday return.

"Shall we go back to my office?" Warren suggested, coming up to them.

Jessup nodded.

As they walked back into the building, Jessup remained silent. He walked close to Miss Boyce while Warren lead the way and Robert brought up the rear.

A few minutes later he, Jessup and Warren were comfortably seated in the Civil Administrator's office and Miss Boyce remained at her desk outside. Warren offered Jessup a drink of coconut brandy, which he accepted.

"I have video tapes of the encounter," Jessup said after he had finished off his drink. He looked at Robert. "Each sub-scout is equipped with a video camera fore and aft. As soon as we activate the sonic beam they are automatically switched on."

Robert nodded.

"We heard everything," Warren said. "The mother ship tied us into your transmitting frequency."

"Then you realize we had no choice but to kill them?"

"Had I been in your place," Warren said, "I would have done the same thing."

"Will you endorse the official report?" Jessup questioned.

"Yes."

Again Jessup looked at Robert. "Whenever a sea farmer kills without official authorization," he explained, "it is a criminal act and punishable as such unless it receives official sanction."

"I did not know that," Robert said.

Jessup smiled; and, though he said nothing, Robert knew he had just been told there were many things he did not know about the law and the sea farmer.

"According to your conversation with Munsey," Warren said, "your search revealed nothing?"

"That's right," Jessup answered.

"Did you notice anything peculiar about the sharks, anything that might have indicated that they were afflicted with some disease which might explain their unusual behavior?"

"No."

"What is your guess about it?" Warren asked.

Jessup shrugged. "I don't have any. Whatever it was that caused them to attack was invisible."

"Did you initiate any water-analysis procedures?" Robert asked.

"The usual instruments were operating but their readings were all normal."

The three men were silent. Then Warren said, "It might have been one of those freak things that happen now and then."

"The mako shark has a reputation for being mean," Jessup said. "And those babies were the meanest I have ever seen."

"What herd do they come from?" Robert asked.

"The Bermuda," Jessup replied.

"How long did it take them to cover the distance from where they were to the passageway?"

"About seventy-two hours," Jessup said.

"That means they were traveling fast and almost without stopping?"

"Yes."

"Does the herd move as far as the northern coast of South America?"

Jessup nodded.

"Then it's just possible that they were aware of the channel and came straight for it," Robert suggested.

Jessup started to laugh. "Of all the fish in the ocean, though he might be one of the biggest and probably one of the most ferocious, the shark has a brain that's millions of years old. The only thing it's really good for is smelling things. They can't see worth a damn!"

"They have excellent hearing," Warren interjected.

"Yes," Jessup said, "but they couldn't hear their way down the channel. And as far as their sense of smell goes, I don't believe that there was anything out there for them to smell."

"I still believe it was a freak occurrence," Warren said. "What do you think, Doctor?"

"You could be right," Robert answered. "It's the only plausible explanation that we have for now."

"Jessup," Warren said, "the doctor wants to spend some time at the Barbuda Station; would you be able to accommodate him?"

Jessup hesitated. Then he said, "If I may be frank," he said, "you will not be the island's most welcome guest."

"I have already told him that," Warren said.

"My purpose here is not to be a welcome guest but to find out why two successive harvests have been below minimal quotas."

"What if I tell you," Jessup said, "that your purpose here is to prove that my people are responsible for the difficulty?"

"Jessup!" Warren exclaimed.

Robert held up his hand. "He said what he had to say, but if that were the truth," Robert said, "then I would have no need to go to Barbuda, would I?"

Jessup thought for a few moments. "You can stay with me," he said.

"I hold you responsible for his safety," Warren said.

Jessup nodded.

"When do we leave?" Robert asked.

"Tomorrow morning."

"I thought—"

"Tomorrow morning," Jessup said.

When Jessup saw Warren and the doctor leave the Civil Administration Building together, he knew that it would not be long before Deidre would be along. He sat down on the pedestal of one of the many statues that decorated the front approach to the building and looked at the sunset. The sky was filled with

long sweeps of vermilion stratus clouds that looked like tongues of flame. He knew the night would be clear and, because the moon was still in its new phase, the sky would be filled with stars. It would be a good night to be with a woman. He turned away from the sunset and looked toward the steps.

He suddenly realized that Deidre could have left the building through the rear exit. He was about to leave his perch and go directly to the office when he saw her. She came out of the door, stopped and looked around.

He smiled. She had expected him to wait and that made him feel good. He watched her walk slowly down the steps. She was dressed in the regulation uniform: a white skirt and matching short-sleeved blouse. The insignia of her rank and occupation was embroidered over her right breast. She reached the bottom step and stopped. There was an unmistakable look of disappointment on her face. She seemed to sigh, attempted to straighten her shoulders and began to walk. When she was just past him he left the pedestal and followed behind her.

She turned and exclaimed, "What?"

"Now that's a helluva greeting," Jessup said, falling in beside her.

She was still confused. "I didn't expect . . . I mean you weren't . . ."

"Yes I was," he said. "I was sitting behind that statue there. The one of the nude woman."

She flushed. "Then you saw me look for you?"

"Yes. I thought it was kind of cute."

"Mr. Coombs—"

"Jessup," he said. "Remember?"

"Jessup, you could have shown yourself," she told him.

"And spoil the fun?"

Deidre did not answer.

"Where do you live?"

"Do you really think that I'm going to allow you in my apartment?"

"Yes," he said simply, and took her hand.

They walked for several minutes without speaking, then Deidre asked, "The young man who died," she questioned, "did you know him well?"

Jessup let go of her hand. "I knew him," he answered tersely. Then he added, "I told him to get out of there. That was no place for an inexperienced man."

"I didn't mean to upset you," Deidre said.

"Maybe," he said softly as though he were talking to himself, "he was dead before the shark got to him."

Again silence fell between them. Like most sea farmers Jessup was inured to the reality of death. His father and two brothers had died at sea. His father had been taken by a giant squid and his brothers had died while training killer whales. He had lost his mother during a hurricane. Early in his life he realized that he was not alone in loss. Other men had lost sons, daughters, sweethearts and friends. That was the way it was when men tamed a hostile element. But his real lesson came while he was on Kiska. There death came slowly, mostly by design, unless there was an accident in the mine. Death and life played

at the same gaming table when it came to the claiming of a sea farmer or a member of his family for the prize.

"I am glad that you weren't hurt," Deidre said, linking her arm with his.

He felt the warmth of her bare forearm against his and looked at her. She was smiling up at him. "You know," he said softly, "we are not supposed to be together."

"I know," she answered.

"And you don't care?"

"I think I care very much," she whispered and pressed his arm against her small breast.

A few minutes later Jessup closed the door to her apartment. Deidre stood in the center of the large room. "This is my home," she announced. "I have an infra-red cooking range, the necessary bathroom and toilet facilities and a bed, which folds into the wall during the day."

Jessup walked toward her. She stood very still. There was enough light still coming through the single window to give her brown hair a beautiful glow. He put his arms around her and drew her to him. For an instant she stiffened and then she relaxed against him. He lifted her face and put his lips to hers. She parted her lips and he found her tongue. He felt her tremble. "I have thought about you," he whispered.

"I hoped you would come back soon," she told him.

He ran his hand down the broad of her back and finally caressed the soft mounds of her rump. "I want you," he said.

She sought his lips with hers.

His hand moved over her breasts.

She looked down at his hand. "There's hardly enough of me there for you to hold," she said.

"You don't hear me complaining," he answered.

She stepped away from him and went to the wall where she pressed a control button that opened the wall and slowly released the bed. Then she unbuttoned her blouse and took it off. She looked at him and started to reach behind her to undo her bra.

Jessup suddenly realized she was embarrassed to undress in front of him. "I think I'll take a shower," he said. "Which way do I go?"

"Just off to the left there," she said.

He started for the bathroom.

"Jessup?" Deidre called.

He stopped and faced her.

"Thank you," she whispered.

He smiled and continued on his way. It had been more years than he cared to remember since a woman had been ashamed to undress in front of him. He stripped and showered. Then he used the warm-air dryer to remove the water from his body. When he was ready to rejoin Deidre, he did not know whether he should go back nude or not. He spotted a large face towel. It was just big enough for him to wrap around his torso. A moment later he re-entered the room.

Deidre was in bed. Her body was covered with a sheet. The light was dim. Jessup moved toward the bed. He hadn't realized how very beautiful she was. He stood over her for a long time.

"I'm really not afraid," she whispered and raised her arms toward him.

"I didn't think you were," he answered, bending low over her and at the same time slipping on to the bed.

She moved over to make room for him.

He lifted the sheet and joined her. Her naked body was hot wherever it touched his. He put his lips to hers. Very slowly he caressed her nakedness until she reached out to him. Her touch was feathery light and it made him quiver.

She closed her eyes. "This is the second time," she whispered.

He lifted his lips from her bare nipple.

"When I was very young," she told him, "just fifteen, I was sent to a summer camp. The boy who did it to me made me want never to have a man love me again." She opened her eyes. "Then I saw you," she told him, "and I wanted you to love me."

"Why me?"

She shook her head. "I don't really know."

Jessup kissed her lips and caressed her naked thighs.

"I love you," she whispered, moving so that he would understand what she wanted.

He slipped over her and as they moved together Jessup realized that she meant a great deal more to him than just another woman for a night's pleasure.

"Love me!" she pleaded as she neared the moment of her ecstasy. "Love me!"

"Yes," he answered. "Yes. I love you. I love you, Deidre!"

Their two bodies molded together and for an instant each of them was flung into the vortex of absolute self-annihilation, where only physical love has meaning.

As they finally grasped hold of reality again Jessup said, "I meant what I told you."

Deidre ran her fingers over his bare chest. "What are we going to do?" she asked.

"I don't know," he said. "I don't really know." He lay back with his hands behind his head and stared at the ceiling. His eyelids began to close and he knew he was falling asleep. He felt Deidre kiss him and he smiled. He turned toward her and cupped her bare breast in his hand.

Part III: *THE NOISE OF MANY WATERS* (*Psalms* XCIII, 4)

XII

In the days that followed Robert's arrival at the Barbuda Station, he had time to see that the living conditions of the sea farmers had not changed in fifteen years. They still lived in makeshift buildings, some of which were made of native rock or sheets of corrugated iron and logs from palm trees. The government did not allow them to fell or import any other type of timber. Most of the men were dressed very much the same way as Jessup and the women wore simple white shifts which they kept scrupulously clean. And the children for the most part went naked until they reached the age of puberty. Everyone went barefoot.

The room that Robert shared with Jessup was in the Duval house, which was located at the far end of the town near a beautifully white sand beach. Just beyond the beach was a thick grove of coconut palms and farther down the length of the beach was a formation of volcanic rock that stuck out from the side ridge of the mountain which formed the island. There were two windows in the room; one looked out on the open sea and the other faced the beach.

Mrs. Duval was a widow. Jessup had told Robert that she had lost her husband several years back. She was about fifty but still retained a good figure and a

handsome face. When he had first arrived, Mrs. Duval wasn't at all pleased. She stood with her hands on her hips and argued with Jessup in the patois of the islands. Robert pretended not to understand but he did. She told Jessup that she did not want anyone from the government under her roof and that was that; but Jessup told her that it did not matter what she wanted. The man was his guest. Finally Mrs. Duval gave in and Jessup explained when they were alone in the room that the woman's attitude was no different from any of the sea farmers toward a representative of the government. Robert did not pursue the matter.

The first evening Robert was surprised to see four children at the dinner table. There were three girls and a boy. The oldest girl, Louise, was in her early twenties; the other two, Marsha and Alice, were in their teens. They had many of their mother's features but bore a striking resemblance to the picture of a man that hung on the wall who, Robert guessed, was Mr. Duval. The boy was probably ten and, though he looked somewhat like his mother, he strongly resembled Jessup.

The atmosphere during the very simple dinner of fish soup and bread was terribly strained. The three girls never once looked up from their food but now and then the boy, whose name was Ian, stole glances at him.

When dinner was over Jessup announced that he was going to pay Mrs. Dugan a visit and asked if anyone wanted to go with him. Before he received an answer he turned to Robert. "I am sorry," he said, "but I did not mean to include you."

"I understand," Robert replied, but he was somewhat taken aback by the man's bluntness.

"Now," Jessup said, "who will go?"

"I will go," the oldest girl said, looking up at Jessup.

"Good!" Jessup exclaimed.

The instant she looked up her blue eyes swept across Robert's face. He wanted to smile but did not.

The two younger ones looked at each other, nodded, and Marsha said, "We will go too." Then she added, "Mrs. Dugan is pregnant—"

"How do you know that?" asked Mrs. Duval.

"I heard some women speaking. They said that her husband never knew it. She was going to tell him when he came back," Marsha explained.

Mrs. Duval heaved a weary sigh. "Better she lose the baby," she said, "and may God forgive me for saying so."

Louise's head bobbed up. "You must not say that!" she exclaimed. Her white cheeks were flushed and her blue eyes flashed. "The only hope we have is in the children."

"She's right!" Robert exclaimed. Suddenly everyone at the table was looking at him. He felt himself grow hot with embarrassment. "I didn't mean to intrude," he apologized and quickly left the table. A moment later he was safe behind the door of his room. He went to the window. The sky was alive with stars. He heard the soft rush of the sea against the beach and a pleasant breeze blew off the water.

The door opened behind him and he turned toward it.

"I will probably be back late," Jessup said. "Why

don't you get a good night's sleep? Tomorrow and the days that follow will be long and hard for you."

"I was thinking of walking along the beach," Robert said, only because he did not want to give Jessup the impression that he was frightened or that he did not have a will of his own.

"Suit yourself," Jessup answered with a shrug, "but remember I am responsible for your safety. Don't go wandering off. Give the people a chance to get used to you."

Robert smiled. "I will go no farther than the palm trees or the outcropping of rock," he said.

Jessup closed the door without making an additional comment.

A few minutes later Robert left the room. Mrs. Duval was in the big room cleaning the dinner dishes. As Robert walked toward the door she turned to him. "Jessup says that you were here fifteen years ago?"

Robert nodded and said, "I did research work here for my doctorate." The room was much starker and poorer than it had been with the children at the table. A primitive electric light shed its yellow glare over the floor and walls like the dripping of melted butter. The dishes lay heaped in an old-fashioned sink; even the water taps dated back to the middle of the twentieth century.

"Why did you come back?" she asked, scanning his face with her blue eyes.

"I was sent," Robert answered.

Her brow furrowed and she pursed her lips. "Nobody comes here unless they're sent," she said. "Are you here to make trouble for us?"

Robert looked down on the raw wood floor. "I hope not," he said in a low voice.

"We have more than enough trouble just keeping our bones together," she said. "We don't need any outsiders."

Remember, the sea farmers are taught to hate us from the moment they can understand. You must not trust them. Robert's head jerked upward. He could almost feel the response that Mr. Wong had so cleverly planted between the memory traces of all the information he had fed into him. He waited a few moments more, almost until he was about to speak, and then he let his own ability to think rationally scan the response. It was torn apart and driven out of his mind forever. Only a few moments had passed between the instant he had perceived the response and destroyed it. "I have come for the truth," Robert said.

"The truth is," Mrs. Duval said, "that the sea has gone sour."

Robert smiled at the quaintness of the woman's idea.

"Believe me or not," she said, "it's God's way of bringing his children to their knees."

"Perhaps you are right," Robert answered, knowing it would be useless to attempt to explain that there must be a cause for what had happened to the harvest.

Mrs. Duval went back to her washing and Robert continued to the door. Just as he was about to step outside she said, "Stay close to the house."

"I will," he answered.

She made a grunting sound of approval.

Robert closed the door and walked down to the

beach. Halfway there he stopped and removed his shoes and socks. The sand felt cool and gritty against the soles of his feet. He went to the water's edge and looked out on the open sea. In the distance the red and dark-blue night sky flashed white heat lightning.

By dawn the following morning Robert was on his way with Jessup to the Central Complex on the island. Mrs. Duval had prepared a light breakfast of synthetic coffee and cakes of fish flour that had been chemically treated to taste like bread. She was silent, almost sullen. When Jessup asked her if she were feeling well she answered that her sleep had been plagued by nightmares. She left the big room before the men had finished breakfast.

"The Complex," Jessup said, "is within walking distance."

"That's fine."

"Have you any other clothes?" Jessup asked.

Robert looked down at his uniform. "No," he answered. "I didn't think—"

"Never mind," Jessup told him, "come back into the bedroom. I would judge we're both the same size."

A few minutes later Robert was dressed in a pair of work trousers and a short-sleeved shirt. Jessup had even provided him with a knife. "I might as well go barefoot too," Robert said, removing his shoes and socks.

"The more you look like one of us," Jessup said, "the easier you'll have it." And he handed him a wide-brimmed straw hat. "All that's lacking is the tan, but that will come within a few days."

Outside the air was cool. The red-rimmed sun was

coming up over the eastern horizon and the sea was smooth.

Robert walked alongside of Jessup. He made no attempt to speak though he wanted to know how Mrs. Dugan was. As they went through the center of town, other sea farmers were leaving their homes. They exchanged greetings with Jessup but ignored Robert.

Less than a half-hour later they began to climb the steps of the Complex, which stood on the top of the mountain.

"Since you were here last," Jessup said, "the technology has changed." He stopped and pointed to a small hillock on the west side of the island. "That was where the Control Complex stood, but ten years ago it was enlarged and moved to the top of the mountain."

The Complex, at least that part which Robert could see, was a small, cylindrical building. When they finally reached it, they passed through an electric eye and the doors opened. Inside an auto-guard stopped them and they were asked to identify themselves. When the information they gave was verified, the auto-guard allowed them to pass.

Jessup led the way to the control room which was located several hundred feet below the surface. "Most of the work is automatically controlled," Jessup said as they entered a huge room.

On one wall was a huge map of the Caribbean sea farm. "You can see," Jessup said, pointing to the map, "that our domain extends from the Bermudas on the North to the eastern limits of the Sargasso Sea in the

East, then as far south as Trinidad and to the West to the Coast of Mexico."

Jessup pointed out where the water was shallow and calm enough to raise algae and where kelp had been introduced. He showed Robert those areas given over to the production of mollusks of different varieties, ranging from the mussel to the oyster. Certain stretches of the farm were entirely devoted to raising species of anthropoda, but the biggest and most important crop was from the chrodata, the animal phyla of fish and aquatic mammals. But nothing that the sea produced was overlooked; even the unicelled diatoms were raised so that others might feed on them.

Robert nodded. He had known all that; he had been told.

"This map is a three-dimensional display of the entire area. From all our automatic sensing devices information about water temperature, salinity, fish movements and winds are displayed. If at any time conditions fail to meet the correct parameters a warning is sent out and appropriate measures are taken to correct the situation. Naturally, there are certain elemental conditions over which we have no control but the important information such as the movements of the various species of fish we can control."

"You still make use of the layer differentiation," Robert questioned.

Jessup smiled. "Yes," he said, "but we have added the use of sonic dividers that keep one layer from mixing with another. In fact, we have managed to make sonic corridors which the fish follow."

Though Robert knew everything that Jessup was

telling him, he listened patiently. Several times he caught himself thinking that Jessup was not telling him the truth, but he knew that Wong had arranged his memory pattern to include doubt and suspicion.

"The Complex," Jessup said, "is most important during a hurricane."

"Why?" Robert asked. Here was something that Wong had not included.

"Often the sea gets churned up to thirty—maybe as deep as fifty—fathoms. The fish are thrown together in a haphazard fashion. But because the sonic beams remain undisturbed they make every effort to stay with them."

It was almost lunch time when Robert had completed his tour of the Complex. There were other rooms. Some were equipped with video monitors from which he could see the ocean at any depth in the sea farm; others kept track of the hundreds of mother ships that were scattered throughout the tens of thousands of square miles.

"Mostly," Jessup said as they left the Complex, "the real work of keeping going falls to the mother ship on station. She always has her sub-scouts out, or aquaplanes, and of course she is fully equipped with electronic instrumentation."

"Your instruments gave no indication of what was happening during the harvest?" Robert asked as they started down the mountainside.

Jessup stopped. "I will tell you this once and only once," he said. The muscles in his face tightened. "I have told Warren and the Director of your Institute that we knew nothing of what was happening until the harvest was in. Everything looked quite normal,

only it wasn't." As though his movement served to accentuate what he had said, he started to walk.

Robert fell in alongside him. He did not speak; instead he looked about him. The sun was at its highest point. The island was filled with a profusion of wild flowers and the sea was now a light malachite blue.

When they reached the main street of the town four men stood in the middle of the street. Jessup slowed his pace. "I think we have trouble," he said in a barely audible voice. "I hope you know how to use your fists."

"It has been a while," Robert admitted.

"What's all this about?" Jessup called out to the men when they were still several yards away from them.

"What's he doing here?" one of the men asked.

"He was sent down to find out what happened to the harvest," Jessup answered.

"You mean he was sent down here to spy us," another man called out.

"He is not a spy," Jessup told them. "He is a scientist."

The four men looked at each other. Then one of them said, "That don't mean that he's not a spy."

By this time the street had become crowded with spectators. "Get rid of him," an onlooker shouted.

"We don't need him to add to our troubles," a voice echoed.

"Listen to me," Jessup suddenly shouted. "He's your only chance to prove that we didn't tamper with the crop."

"That's just talk, Jessup!" one of the four men

answered. "What can he tell the government that they don't already know?"

"The truth!" Robert suddenly yelled. The sound of his own voice startled him. He glanced at Jessup but the man paid no attention to him.

"They already have the truth," a man from the side shouted. "Tell them to give us back our normal ration!"

"Here they come!" Jessup exclaimed.

Robert saw the four men slowly advance.

"Don't be fools!" Jessup exhorted.

Robert tensed himself but the first blow in the stomach took the wind out of him; he doubled up. Out of the corner of his eye he saw the vicious swing of a knee. To dodge it, he rolled over on his back and at the same time grabbed for the onrushing foot. He caught it and twisted. The man came down beside him. Robert scrambled to his feet. One of the attackers swung his fist at him; Robert took the blow on the shoulder and managed to land a solid right on the man's chin. The man went down.

"Watch out from behind!" Jessup yelled.

Robert tried to wheel around but the blow on the back of the neck caught him first. The bright of day suddenly deflated into blackness.

"He's coming to," a woman said.

Robert opened his eyes. His vision was blurred. "Jessup?" he questioned.

"He's all right," the woman answered.

He tried to move his neck. It hurt.

"Better remain still," she said. "I'll put another hot towel on it."

A few moments later he felt the heat of the towel ease the stiffness. The woman's hands were gently massaging his neck muscles. He could see her more clearly now. It was Mrs. Duval's eldest daughter Louise. Her fingers felt soft. "Where am I?" he questioned.

"In the school," she answered.

"How did I get here?"

"The men brought you."

"Where's Jessup?"

"Resting on the cot at the other side of the room," she answered. "I've been speaking to him."

"Thank you for taking care of me," Robert said.

She shrugged.

"I think I can stand," he said and started to sit up. He had moved more rapidly than he had intended and found his face just a short distance from hers. The perfumed scent of her made his nostrils dilate. Her face and jet-black hair were more beautiful than he had thought they were when he first saw her the night before. The simple shift she wore had fallen away from her full breasts. He saw they were tan and tipped with rose-pink nipples.

As soon as she became aware of what he was looking at, Louise flushed and moved away. "I think you can manage on your own," she said.

Robert fought down the desire to grasp her to him.

"I'm sure I can," he said and looked toward the cot where Jessup lay. "Can you move?" he asked.

"I've been waiting for you," Jessup answered and stood up.

XIII

After a day's rest Robert joined Jessup on one of the mother ships off the island of Trinidad. Though the ship's crew and sea farmers were sulky about his being there they did not stop him from examining any of the fish they brought up or from asking questions. None of them had the slightest idea what had happened to the harvest, though several put forth the same theory that Mrs. Duval had.

Before the beginning of the second week Robert was aquaplaning along the ocean bottom as well as any of the sea farmers. He had a real love for looking at the life below the sea. Every reef was an adventure. The coral beds made him think of huge castles and the myriad of multicolored fish were a delight to his eye. Quite often he enjoyed himself so much that he actually forgot he was on an assignment.

Several times he and Jessup took a two-man subscout into the depths where they were forced to provide their own light. Jessup made sure that he saw the various types of ocean life which formed the huge crop from the Caribbean Farm.

The days Robert spent out on the open sea tanned his body and cleansed his brain. For the first time in many years he felt like a man again. All that had happened to him back at the Institute had no meaning for

him, and his feeling—even the pain that Marion had inflicted on him—was washed away by the sea.

Robert found himself drawn to Jessup, though the warning patterns in his memory caused him to retreat from his own advances to gain the man's friendship or from any overtures made to him. More often than not, his consciousness did not respond quickly enough to the warning stimulus and then it was only in retrospect that he could understand what had prompted him to say or act the way he had. But even with the obstacle that Wong had placed in his way, Robert couldn't help but admire Jessup as a man and an individual.

Late one afternoon when they were working close to Barbuda, Jessup suddenly looked up from the hydrogen ion indicator he was using and said, "Mind if I ask you a question?"

"I guess I won't really know if I mind or not until I hear what the question is."

"Why are you fighting yourself so hard?"

"I mind," Robert answered.

Jessup shrugged and went back to working with the instrument.

Robert couldn't help feeling that the answer was more Wong's than his own. Yet he realized that he still had an assignment to carry out and in the time he had spent at the sea farm he knew nothing more about the cause of the crop failure than he had known when he had first arrived. There was still the possibility that the sea farmers were sabotaging the harvest in order to force the government to meet their demands for better living conditions. Still he had no desire to alienate Jessup. "I'm sorry," he said.

"I asked and I got an answer," Jessup replied without looking at him.

Robert suddenly realized that he had something to tell Jessup which might well satisfy his curiosity. "I had some difficulty with my wife," he said.

"Oh?"

"We—or rather she—dissolved the marriage agreement."

Jessup looked at him questioningly.

"Things were not going right between us," Robert said, "for quite a while." Then he went on to explain that Marion had joined a Sex Center and that John would be sent to a government center.

Jessup switched off the instrument, glanced at the roll of readout paper. "Everything is normal," he said. "Let's call it a day," he suggested.

"Good! I could use some rest," Robert said.

Jessup started the hydroplane and they skimmed along the surface of the water at close to sixty miles an hour. A short time later they were on their way up from the town quay to Mrs. Duval's house.

"You know," Jessup suddenly said, "you are still young enough to find a woman."

"Chronologically," Robert answered. "But I feel as though I'm a thousand years old in other ways."

Jessup shook his head knowingly. "A woman can do that to a man," he said. "I know the feeling but it was not because of a woman. I spent three years in Kiska; when I returned I felt as though all my energy had been drained. This blue sky and wonderful sea all seemed gray to me. Then I met Lara—Mrs. Duval. She had lost her husband a year before and we both needed someone to look after us. We took each other.

She was an extremely handsome woman then. I was all of twenty-five and she was forty-five. After the boy was born," Jessup said, "our relationship changed." He glanced at Robert.

"He looks a lot like you," Robert said.

Jessup smiled. "Yes," he said, "but he has Lara's wonderful nature."

The conversation ended when they reached the house.

The days passed quickly. Robert was unable to find evidence either of sabotage or a natural cause that could have affected the harvest. Then one evening after dinner when he was about to go down to the beach, the silence of the island was pierced by the shrill blast of a warning signal. The women turned toward Jessup.

"I'll let you know as soon as I can," he said. Then he looked at Robert. "We better get up to the Control Complex."

Jessup ran all the way and Robert was right beside him. The other sea farmers were also running toward the Complex. They immediately went down to the control room. Jessup pushed his way forward and scanned the electronic map. A band of red showed on the huge screen.

"What does it mean?" Robert asked.

"The underwater fences between the sea farm and the open ocean have been penetrated," Jessup answered. Then he quickly ordered several of the men to go to the video room and try to see what was happening out there. While they were gone he organized several emergency crews. "We'll go out there by the

hovercraft and jump in. The water is only twenty fathoms. Two hydrofoils will follow with sub-scouts. The mother ship will join us late tomorrow. I'll go."

"So will I," Robert said.

Jessup glanced at him, then nodded. "I need five other men."

In a matter of moments he had his volunteers.

"Take the necessary arms," he said.

The men had returned from the video center, only to report that all circuits were dead.

Jessup looked back at the map. The red line had grown. "Whatever is out there," he said, "is doing one helluva lot of damage." He faced the men who would accompany him. "I'll meet you at the hovercraft in thirty minutes." Then he said to Robert, "We'd better get back to the house and tell the women where we're going."

The women had finished the dishes by the time Robert and Jessup returned. The instant he opened the door they looked up at him.

"There is a break in the outer sea fence," he said. "It's about five hundred miles from here. We're going out tonight—"

"Why must you go tonight?" Mrs. Duval asked.

"Whatever it is out there," Jessup said, "it's doing a great deal of damage. I don't want it heading any closer." He opened a closet and took out two high-powered underwater guns and two underwater emergency masks made of special osmotic plastic which would allow the oxygen dissolved in the water to pass into a small breathing chamber. "These will get you to the surface if anything happens to your regular gear."

"You're going to jump in?" Lara asked. Her voice quavered with fear.

"There's no other way," Jessup answered.

"I should be back in a few days," he went on. "Come on, Robert, we must be at quay soon."

Robert picked up the equipment and started after Jessup.

Suddenly Louise rushed to the door and blocked their way. "Why must he go?" she yelled, looking at Robert.

Jessup glanced back at him.

"It may have something to do with my work here," Robert said softly. He was completely embarrassed and surprised by her display of emotion. Other than the time she'd tended him in the school infirmary he had scarcely spoken to her though from time to time he could not help but look at her.

"Don't take him with you, Jessup," she pleaded.

"I must go," Robert told her.

She stepped aside to let them pass.

Robert paused for a moment when he came alongside of her and put his hand under her chin. "I wish I had known before this," he said.

Her big blue eyes were shiny with tears. "I was waiting for you to speak to me," she told him.

"I promise you I will as soon as I return," he assured her and then quickly joined Jessup.

Even as the hovercraft got under way Jessup was on the radio phone to Munsey. Robert could overhear one side of the conversation but from Jessup's reaction it was obvious that Munsey was angry.

"All right," Jessup shouted, "if you want to join us come along." He switched off the equipment and wiped his brow.

"What was that all about?" Robert asked.

"Munsey is miffed because I did not first consult with him before ordering the men and equipment to the break point." He took a deep breath and slowly exhaled. "The hell with him! Sooner or later it was going to come to a showdown between us!"

He turned his attention to the course computer and locked it to the analog of latitude and longitude coordinates transmitted by the electronic map. For the remainder of the trip Jessup busied himself at the control console. About ten minutes from the jump point he announced that he had picked up very strong signals beneath the hovercraft and they continued well beyond the point where the sea fence had been penetrated.

"What do you make of the signals?" one of the men asked.

"Even on high resolution they are too dense to differentiate," he answered.

Robert glanced out at the night sky. The moon was full. Now and then a black dot of a satellite passed in front of it. The sky was cloudless.

"Better get into your gear," Jessup said.

"What about Munsey?" a man asked.

"When he gets here he'll get here," Jessup snapped. "I'm sure as hell not going to wait for him."

The hovercraft slowed down and took its position just inside the fence.

Jessup opened one of the compartments and handed

each man two magnesium grenades. "If you have to use them," he said, "make sure none of the other men are near by." He checked his console again. "I still don't know what's down there," he said. Then he told one of the men to stay with the hovercraft.

A powerful floodlight was turned on. The sea looked even blacker in the glare of light.

"There are two-foot swells down there," Jessup said. "We'll jump singly in the trough of the swell. Head straight down to the bottom. Now each man check his communications equipment. All right," he said, "I'll be the first one out. Robert, you follow me. The rest of you jump in any sequence you want to." He opened the hatchway in the middle of the cabin, pointed downward and leaped feet first into the water.

Robert waited until the crest of a swell passed under the craft and then, with his heart beating so fast and so hard he was almost sure it would fail, he leaped through the hatch. The ten feet between the hovercraft and the surface of the water seemed much greater. Suddenly he felt the water and the next moment he was under. He let his momentum carry him as deep as possible before he somersaulted and headed down. The water was pitch black. His heart had somehow resumed its normal beat.

"Robert?"

He swallowed to clear his ears. "That you, Jessup?" he asked, wetting his lips with his tongue.

"Are you okey?" Jessup asked.

"Yes. See anything?"

"Not much."

"What ever broke through is on its way—hold it!"

"What is it?"

"Get the hell out of here!" Jessup yelled.

"It's too late," another voice answered. "All the men have jumped."

"Try to get to the bottom," Jessup shouted.

The water was pitch black but suddenly Robert was aware of something coming toward him. He pushed himself down with all the strength he could muster. Suddenly he was on the bottom.

"I see you," Jessup said.

The next instant he felt someone touch his shoulder.

"The others?" Jessup asked.

"They should be here any moment."

"Look toward the fence," Jessup said.

"Which way is that?"

Jessup took hold of Robert and turned him toward the fence. It was swarming with a darkness that was even blacker than the water. "What is it?" Robert asked.

"It looks like the whole Atlantic herd of killer whales," Jessup told him.

Suddenly the intercom blared out the death scream of a man.

"They got him!" a voice shouted. "Oh my God! I saw him go!"

"Get down to the bottom!" Jessup ordered.

The blackness of the water exploded into the searing white blindness of a magnesium bomb. In the diminishing light Robert saw the killer whales. They were huge, thirty to forty feet in length. The first bomb tore several of them apart and instantly the others went for the carcasses.

Jessup called out the names of the men. Two of

the five did not respond. The other three had touched bottom just a few feet away from where Robert and Jessup stood.

"Now what?" one of them asked.

"We've got to drive them out and get back to the hovercraft to warn the rest of the sea farmers," Jessup said.

"They are in a tight group," one of the sea farmers said. "If we can get a few grenades into them, maybe the rest of them will head back for the open sea."

"It's worth a try," Jessup said. He ordered the men to deploy around the killer whales who were still busy devouring the remains of the dead whales. "When I say go," he told the men, "we'll start toward them and fire the grenades at them."

Robert took up his position and waited for Jessup's signal. In his wildest dreams he would not have ever imagined himself engaged in mortal combat with a sea monster. The whole thing was absurd, but at the same time exhilarating.

Jessup's voice came over the intercom. Robert started to swim toward the black shapes. Then suddenly the water around him seemed to tremble.

The beasts had sensed something and they were beginning to turn. Jessup still hadn't given the order to fire the grenade. Robert swam closer. One of the whales faced him. He could see its eyes. The lower part of the jaw dropped, then snapped shut. A strange eerie sound filled the water.

"Fire!" Jessup shouted.

Robert pulled the trigger and the grenade rushed toward the monster that faced him. A few seconds later there was a blinding flash. Robert could see the

beast rear back as the grenade hit. The explosion disintegrated the animal and wounded several more.

"Load and fire again!" Jessup ordered.

Robert's second grenade exploded in the midst of three, killing all of them. The others managed to destroy enough of them to make the beasts turn back toward the break in the fence. They started to flee when suddenly several dozen tiger sharks came toward them.

"Head for the surface!" Jessup ordered.

Robert started up. The closer to the surface he came the more clearly he could see the light from the hovercraft; two of the other men were going up with him. "Jessup?" he called.

"Don't worry about me!"

"Where are you?"

He did not answer.

Robert called again just as he broke the surface.

"I'm not coming up," Jessup said. Then he screamed.

Robert started to do a surface dive but the other men stopped him. "I want to go after him," he shouted.

"No use," one of them said.

The other agreed.

A few minutes later the three of them were aboard the hovercraft. "Better send out a general type alert," one of the sea farmers told the man at the controls. "It will be days before the damage is repaired and we manage to kill those killer whales that are inside the fence."

The hovercraft touched down at the quay in Bar-

buda just as the first light of dawn washed the eastern sky gray.

Neither of the two sea farmers said anything to Robert, but as the three of them left the hovercraft each one touched his shoulder and Robert knew they understood that he had lost a friend.

The house was very still when Robert opened the door. He was sure that everyone was still asleep. Quietly he set his equipment down in a corner of the big room. His head ached. The muscles in his shoulders and legs were stiff and sore. He went to the sink, opened the tap and splashed his face with water. He cupped his hands so that he could drink. He was terribly thirsty.

A door opened behind him.

He turned.

Louise stood in the doorway. Her eyes darted around.

"Jessup won't be coming home," Robert said in a whisper.

She stifled a cry with her hand.

"Two others were lost," he said.

She moved out of the doorway and came toward him. Her black hair hung down to her shoulders. She wore a simple cotton nightgown that had been washed so many times it was threadbare. Her nudity showed through it. She stopped in front of him. "I was so afraid that you would not come back," she whispered.

The door to Lara's room opened. She looked at Robert and then at her daughter. "I do not want to know how it happened," she said.

Robert nodded.

"He was a very good man," she said.

"Yes," Robert answered. His throat tightened. "Yes, he was."

"In Ponce," Lara said, "there is a woman he loved. Her name is Deidre Boyce. When you return there tell her that he loved her." Lara smiled sadly. "We had no secrets from each other," she said and stepped back into her room. Then as she started to close the door she said, "Jessup said you were a good man and even though you and Louise cannot be married under the law, I would be proud to have you as my son-in-law." She slowly closed the door.

"Mama loved him," Louise said, "even though she was old enough to be his mother." She faced Robert and took hold of his hand. "The room you shared with Jessup will be ours now."

The love that she gave Robert was a rare heady mixture of passion and gentleness. Later when they lay in each others' arms and Louise had fallen asleep, Robert moved his hand across her face and over her black hair. "I love you, Louise, I love you," he whispered.

She smiled and pressed her naked body closer to his.

Part IV: *NO HUMAN THING IS OF SERIOUS IMPORTANCE* (Plato)

XIV

ZAHN STUDIED the report on his desk. He had read it many times since the Director of the Institute of Marine Biology and Oceanography had sent it to him. He had also read many other reports that had bearing on different aspects of the same subject. He read the last sentence of the last paragraph aloud: "Therefore I have found nothing either to suggest that the sea farmers of the Caribbean Sea Farm are in any way responsible for the diminished yield; neither have I been able to ascertain any changes in the natural environment that would cause the various species of animal life to abandon their period of spawning. It is my recommendation that further investigations be carried out to determine this change in the life cycle of the various species."

Zahn looked up from the typewritten report. His innocent looking face did not change when he said to Robert, "This is your report?"

"Yes sir," Robert replied.

"Almost a hundred pages of the kind of turgid prose for which you scientists are eminently famous when the whole thing could have been summed up in one word. Do you know what that word is?"

"No sir."

"Failure, Doctor. Absolute and utter failure!"

"I tried to do my best—"

Zahn's childlike eyes suddenly flashed. His fist struck the top of the desk. "You tried," he shouted, "to do nothing. Do you think you were on a holiday?"

"No sir."

"You were hand picked for this mission," Zahn said harshly. "Hand picked." And at the same time he spoke to Robert he realized that the Psychological Institute had made an error in assuming that they had indeed reoriented Dr. Wilde. He remembered Wong's suspicions. They had proved to be right. "You were given the unique opportunity to exonerate yourself for your past insubordination against the State."

"I appreciated that," Robert answered in a whisper.

"You appreciated it so much," Zahn shouted, "that you broke the law by living openly with Louise Duval. You look surprised that I know that. I even know that before Jessup Coombs was killed you and he had become friends. Is that how you tried?"

"My work was scientific," Robert replied. "I did not think of it in terms of anything else."

"But you know what the government's attitude is toward the sea farmers?"

Robert nodded.

"You knew," Zahn said, "yet you took it upon yourself to completely disobey the existing law?"

"My work," Robert repeated, "was scientific. I had no political or sociological interest in the sea farmers."

Zahn leaned back on his swivel chair and drummed his fingers on the desk. Politically the man was use-

less, but he did have first-hand knowledge of the technology and still might be useful, especially since the quotas from the other sea farms for the last harvest had also fallen below minimal requirements. It was totally inconceivable that the sea farmers in other parts of the world were also revolting. Zahn was absolutely sure that something else was taking place. He decided to gamble once more. His face softened. "Perhaps," he said, "I have been too harsh with you. After all, you are a scientist and care little about the problems of government. Understand," he said, "I am just a layman and know little about things of science; but is it possible that by our extensive technology we have inadvertently upset the natural balance of the ocean by overcontrol?"

Robert moved uneasily.

Zahn watched him very carefully. He was sure that his mention of overcontrol made the doctor feel uncomfortable. "Is that a possibility?" he asked.

"I don't know what you mean," Robert replied. "I have never heard of overcontrol before."

Intuitively Zahn knew that the doctor was lying. He decided to let the matter drop for the time being. "That will be all," Zahn said.

Robert stood up but did not move.

"I said," Zahn told him, "that will be all."

"If I may," Robert began, "ask what will be my status?"

"For the time being you will continue to work at the Institute," Zahn told him.

Robert still didn't move.

"Have you other questions?"

"The sea farmers—"

"They were warned what the consequences would be if their harvest failed to meet—"

"Please," Robert said, "I do not mean to intrude on government policy but if their food ration is cut—"

"Yes?"

"They do not have much now," Robert said.

"What you really mean," Zahn told him, "is that they will resort to violence. Well, let them. We are fully prepared to deal with it. We know that there is a rebellious element in the area, but let me assure you that they will be making a mistake if they resort to force."

"I know nothing of such a group," Robert said. "I do know that if you force the human animal to the wall it will fight."

Zahn smiled. "Yes," he said. "That is what will happen."

"You almost sound as though you wanted it to happen that way," Robert said. As soon as he had spoken he realized that he should have remained silent.

"That's a stupid comment!" Zahn replied sharply.

"I did not mean it the way it sounded," Robert said.

Zahn waved his apology aside. "Perhaps it is in your power to—if not stop the bloodshed—then to limit it." He was going to play the man as far as he could along the lines of his original plan. He was determined to make a hero of the doctor and then tear him down.

"I don't understand."

"Find the cause for the crop failure," Zahn said. "Find it and find it as quickly as you can."

"It might take months."

"Neither you nor I nor the population of this world has that much time," Zahn answered.

Robert nodded.

"You will think about the idea of overcontrol?"

"Yes."

"Perhaps," Zahn said, "if you paid another visit to the Psychological Institute, you might be able to have your own thoughts stimulated on the subject."

"I would prefer not to," Robert said.

"I am not interested in your preferences," Zahn said.

"Then I will go," Robert replied. "But there is one thing more."

"Yes?"

"Couldn't you delay the cut in the food allotment for the sea farmers?"

Zahn had to restrain his desire to smile. The man was so absolutely transparent. "The decision is not mine alone. But under the circumstances I will take it up with the various members of the government whose word on the matter is final."

"Thank you," Robert said. "I will begin to work on the problem immediately."

"You will keep me informed?"

"Yes," Robert answered.

Zahn extended his hand and said, "I wish you luck, Doctor. The results of your work will be most important to our future."

Zahn waited until the door had slid shut after Dr. Wilde had left the office before he turned to the far wall opposite his desk and said, "He is gone, gentlemen." A moment later the wall opened and Mazda

and General Teateau entered and sat down opposite Zahn.

"That kind of man," Teateau said immediately, "is dangerous. Zahn, he should immediately be taken into custody."

Zahn looked at Mazda. "Do you hold the same opinion?"

Mazda placed the tips of his fingers together, which was what he did whenever he wanted to appear thoughtful. "I would prefer to call the man a poor risk," he finally said. "I think it was a mistake to allow him to leave this office and to continue working on the project. Obviously, his sympathies lie with the sea farmers. Why in blazes did you bargain with the man? You should have told him straight out that government policy is not to be changed—"

Zahn held up his hand and shook his head. He found it regrettable that he was forced to deal with mediocrity but that was what the government foisted on him. Mazda and Teateau reflected the perfection which the absolutism of breeding and environment had reached. He would much rather have dealt with the kind of man that Dr. Wilde was. At least Wilde was capable of thinking, however dangerous it was. "Could you suggest that someone else take over the role which the doctor has been assigned to play out?" he asked.

"There must be someone else?" Teateau said.

"I assure you," Zahn said with a weary sigh, "that there is no one. His qualifications were checked and double-checked by our assignment computers. We are, to put it bluntly, gentlemen, stuck with him."

"And if he should fail?" Mazda asked.

"What we have undertaken," Zahn answered, "is one huge gamble. Dr. Wilde is just another infinitesimal part of that gamble."

Mazda looked at Teateau and both of them nodded.

"As you heard," Zahn said, "he will return to the Psychological Center and they will reactivate his memory about the work he had done on overcontrol."

"Do you think that may be the answer?" Teateau asked.

Zahn shrugged. "It has little to do with what I think," he said. "At least it provides a starting point. Besides, even if it is not the cause the people at the Institute have methods to make him prove that it is. Later on when everything is in our control we will prove that he falsified the results and bring him to trial."

"Then you have altered your original plan?" Mazda questioned.

"Only by the part which Dr. Wilde will play."

"Why do we need him?"

"As before, to prove to the people that we have their interests in mind," Zahn answered.

"Are you going to keep your agreement with him?" Teateau asked.

"Outwardly."

"Explain yourself," Mazda said.

"My agents at the sea farm will cause them to move against several government installations which in turn will necessitate a punitive action from the government."

Mazda smiled. "You see, Teateau, you will yet

command an army in the field." He looked at Zahn. "He was beginning to worry that you would deny him the opportunity of using his strike force."

"He will have more of an opportunity than he hoped for," Zahn said. He tapped several reports on his desk. "Have you any idea what these are?"

"That's an absurd question," Mazda said.

Zahn smiled. "They are reports from the other sea farmers," he said. "You, Mazda, will shortly be informed at your Council meeting that the harvests from other areas of the world are far below their minimal quota."

Mazda paled and Teateau coughed nervously.

"I see you gentlemen understand the full significance of this?" Zahn paused. He was about to tell them again what they had previously heard and that was that Dr. Wilde did not find the sea farmers guilty of any sabotage and was unable to discover any natural cause for the poor harvest, which meant that something else was taking place, most probably on a worldwide scale.

"A plot!" Teateau exclaimed. "A plot by the sea farmers to force us to bend to their demands."

Zahn was so astounded by the general's words that he stopped himself from speaking. He looked at Mazda.

"It's inconceivable!" he whispered.

Zahn quickly grasped the opportunity that they had unwittingly thrown to him. Neither of them had understood the meaning of overcontrol or that the possibility existed for an unknown factor which caused the poor yields. They still firmly believed that the whole difficulty lay with the sea farmers.

He decided to let them continue to believe that. "So it seems, gentlemen," he said, "that we are faced with a threat in many different parts of the world. Therefore we will single out the Caribbean Sea Farm and make an example of it. We already know that if we cut their rations they will rise up."

"But your agents will incite them to act before you cut their rations," Mazda said boisterously. "Wonderful. Just wonderful!" He turned to the general. "Don't you see the beauty of it all? They will be the ones who take the initiative and then we have the right and the consent of the people to take what measures are necessary to put down the revolt."

"Precisely," Zahn said.

"And the other sea farms?" Teateau asked.

"They too will take up arms."

"Excellent!" Teateau exclaimed.

"Once this takes place we will be very close to seizing power," Zahn told them. "We will be in a position to give the people stability and food, the food being the more important of the two at the time."

Suddenly Mazda snapped his fingers. He smiled broadly. "And Dr. Wilde will provide us with an accusation to hurl at the fallen government if he should succeed in proving overcontrol and then later on we will be in a position to prove him wrong." He began to laugh. "It's a variation on your original scheme."

"I told you so," Zahn said with a shrug of his shoulders. "The ability to adapt to changing situations is a priceless human quality."

"When will you instruct your agents to—"

"In less than two weeks."

"Why wait?" Mazda asked.

"This time the information about the poor harvests must not be withheld from the people," Zahn said.

"But that's impossible!" Mazda said. "They will turn into a mob. I cannot answer for the consequences."

"There will be no consequences," Zahn told him, "if they are assured that there is a sufficient amount of food in storage for all and that the government is making every effort to meet the demands of the sea farmers. And most important, the information given to the people on the mainland continents must not reach the sea farmers. In other words, I want the people to be ready for the sea farmers to revolt and feel no pity for them when the general's strike force moves against the insurrectionists."

Mazda looked at Teateau and then at Zahn. "I think it will work," he said.

"So do I," Zahn answered, "or I would not have thought of it."

XV

Munsey lifted his hand and stroked his red beard. He had never been much of a speaker but now he would soon have to convince the sea farmers to act, to take things into their own hands. He wasn't sure that he was equal to the task. He could face danger with a certain amount of ease but to make men act—Jessup could have done it easily. That man was a natural leader. Men followed him as naturally as the tides follow the phases of the moon. As for himself, he was a loner. Too angry most of the time to let anyone come close to him.

He stood up and began to pace the floor of the empty shack. He had been a sea farmer all of his life. His father and grandfather had followed the same road through their lives until the sea claimed both of them. Now he was being given the opportunity to change that for himself and his family. But at what price? He stopped pacing.

The agent had told him that the government intended to further reduce the food allotment, which would mean starvation for everyone. He had a duty to protect his family if he could. He could do much more for them than assure that they would be fed. Once the trouble was over he could give them a new life. His children would be allowed to go to govern-

ment schools on the mainland and become citizens, while he himself would be given a special post. No longer would he have to risk his life. He would live in ease and not die the way Jessup had.

He walked behind the rough wooden table and sat down. He knew that if Jessup had been presented with the same proposition he would have probably killed the man who offered it. But Jessup was a fool. Those three years at Kiska blinded him to the realities of life. He saw only one side of the coin. He expected the government to improve conditions because . . . Munsey sighed deeply. The man was a fool. He wanted nothing for himself. Nothing!

Munsey placed his bare elbows on the table and rested his head in his hands. He knew that Jessup would not have done what he must do. If he did not look out for himself and his family, who would? He vowed that when he became a government-appointed official he would do all in his power to help his people. A few must be sacrificed for the good of the many. It was the way of the world. He did not control the events that made things the way they were. If the harvests had been good then none of this would have come to pass. But the ifs didn't matter. Only the reality had meaning and the harsh reality which faced him and all the others was starvation. A sound outside the shack startled him and he leaped to his feet. "Who's there?"

"It's only me," a man answered and opened the door. "Am I the first?" he asked, looking at the empty room.

"The others will be here soon enough," Munsey answered.

Within the next fifteen minutes some dozen men entered the shack. Munsey saw that all the leaders were present and since Jessup's death they looked to him as their chief. He stood up and the whispering faded away. "Men," he began, "I called you here to tell you that the government will shortly reduce our food allotment."

"But we just make do now!" one of them said.

"The children will not survive it!" a second man said.

In a matter of moments every one was shouting his disapproval. Munsey let them have their say. Then he pounded on the table for silence.

"Listen to me," he shouted. "If we let them do this we all will lose someone. No family will be spared the slow walk to the graveyard." He paused. The words formed up in his mind much more easily than he had imagined they would. He let them spill out of his mouth. "The time has come to show the government that we will not be blamed for something that is not our responsibility. The harvests have been poor but we didn't make them that way, did we?"

He got a chorus of *noes.*

"We cannot afford to let the government get the jump on us. We need food now. We will need food later."

His audience agreed with him.

"The sea farmers here and in the other places produce the bulk of the food for the world, yet we are denied all the rights and privileges other citizens have." His words sounded like Jessup's. "We must not let them punish us for something over which no man has any control."

The men agreed. Then one called out: "But what can we do?"

"We can provide for our own," Munsey shouted.

"How?"

"Take what we have harvested from the sea," Munsey told them.

Except for the breathing of the men a heavy silence fell over the room.

"There's food at Ponce," Munsey said. Over the boom of his heart he could hardly hear his own words. "I say we go there and take it." He looked at the faces in front of him. They were wide-eyed and taut with fear. "If we act before they do then maybe they will come to understand that we do not intend to be starved to death."

"You want to carry out Jessup's threat?" a man asked.

"Yes, if you put it that way."

"You were against it just a few weeks ago," a man challenged. "What made you change your mind?"

"The results of the harvest," Munsey answered.

"Who told you that our food allotment would be cut further?" a voice asked.

"A man I met when I visited the Civil Administrator."

"Who was he?"

Munsey didn't like the question but he knew he had to answer it. "A member of the Civil Administrator's staff," he said. The back of his shirt was wet with sweat.

"I say Munsey is right!" one of the members shouted. "We just can't take this sitting down."

"If we raid Ponce," another questioned, "what will the government do?"

"I'll tell you what they will do," someone said, "they'll make us pay with our blood."

"Either way we're on the losing end," another man answered. "But if we raid Ponce at least they'll know that we won't take their kicks lying down."

"They'll hunt us down."

"Let them. This is a big ocean. They'll have the devil of a time finding us. Besides, we could destroy this sea farm so that they'll never get another crop out of it."

The words flew around the room like so many frantic birds. Those who were for the raid attempted to argue down those who were against it. Then finally someone suggested that a vote be taken. Munsey agreed and asked for a show of hands of those who favored the raid. Nine of the twelve were for it. The three who were against agreed to abide by the vote.

The whole thing had been much easier than Munsey had thought it would. He smiled at them. "I think we had better decide when and how it will take place," he said, and then he quickly outlined a plan by which they would use a task force of three mother ships and four thousand men. "We must act before they move the food from the storage area to the processing plants on the mainland," he told them.

The time set for the attack was three nights away. Munsey would take the first wave in and overpower the security guards and destroy communications with the mainland. Now that Munsey was detailing the plans for the operation he felt much more at ease.

"Aside from the food," he told the twelve leaders, "I would not discourage your men from taking whatever other booty they could carry. Before we leave all buildings must be put to the torch."

"What about women?" a member of the group asked.

"If you don't know what to do with a woman," Munsey laughed, "you're not man enough to join us."

Everyone laughed. A spirit of excitement filled the air, and only Munsey knew that behind it lay death. . . .

Munsey landed his men on a beach less than a mile from Ponce. It was still dark, and Venus hung low in the western sky. His band of men raced through the sugar-cane fields and swung behind the city. At the first light of day they reached the outskirts of the high ground. The fifty men he had taken with him were armed with high-powered undersea guns and magnesium grenades. In addition, each man carried the traditional knife of the sea farmer.

The band made its way directly to the communications center which was located on the top of the highest hill behind the city. In a few minutes the four security guards were knifed to death and their automatic weapons taken by members of the group.

Munsey ordered the communications equipment smashed and went on to the city's arsenal. They quickly took possession of it. Inside they found more than enough weapons for the four thousand men they had with them.

By seven in the morning Ponce was completely in

the hands of the sea farmers. All that had to be done was move the food from storage areas to their own ships. Munsey took five hundred men to the storage area and there they met with stiff resistance. In just a matter of minutes more than fifty men were killed and an equal number were wounded.

The security police began to lay down a steady field of fire. Munsey returned the fire and in desperation ordered the magnesium grenades to be used. Explosion followed explosion and soon the entire storage area was a mass of flames.

The food Munsey had promised was reduced to ashes. In a rage he ordered his men to kill all the defenders.

An hour later three hundred of the security police were killed and then the sea farmers began to burn and loot the rest of the city. Groups of three and four men roamed the streets killing the men they saw and raping the women. They stuffed their pockets with worthless things which they quickly threw away for something else that struck their fancy.

Munsey and some of the others went to the Civil Administration Building. The members of the government had hidden themselves behind huge steel doors in the building's basement. The doors were burned open by exploding magnesium grenades against them. Munsey killed Warren the moment he saw him, and two other men raped Deidre several times before she finally passed out.

The loss of the food for which they had come enraged the sea farmers, and because of their rage they became terrible in their brutality.

Munsey was quick to realize that having tasted

blood the men had turned into ravenous beasts. He could not stop them. He did not want to stop them. He knew what their feelings were because his were the same.

By noon Ponce was in ruins. Most of its buildings were burning and the smoke rose in a huge black cloud in the blue Caribbean sky.

Hours later when the raiding party was back at sea the cloud changed its shape. It had become a huge cross. Munsey couldn't take his eyes from it. He and his men had done their worst. Now retribution would come, and for the first time in his life Munsey lacked the courage to face what was bound to be meted out to him and those who had followed him.

Ever since his return from Barbuda, Robert had worked eighteen hours a day to find the answer to the problem. Many nights he was just too weary to leave the laboratory and go either to his room in the dormitory or to spend the night with Miss Hartly. Even though the Psychological Institute had reactivated his memory of his research work on overcontrol, he quickly realized that he could progress no further than he had already gone.

Day after day he reproduced in the huge tanks of water from the Caribbean the environmental conditions of the sea farm, but he could not induce the marine life to spawn. Carefully he subjected samples of water to exhaustive spectro-electronic analysis and found that the chemical constituents agreed perfectly with those set down by the Institute. He repeated his analyses a dozen times, only to find that all the results were the same.

During this period of frenetic work he paid little attention to what was happening in the world around him though he did take one afternoon off to visit his son John at a Government Center. The meeting with John was strained. The boy hardly spoke. He looked thinner to Robert and very sad. Robert left the Center feeling very unhappy but he knew there was absolutely nothing that he could do.

For several days after his visit with John he thought about seeing Marion but rejected the idea because he knew it would depress him. Now and then he heard something about the government's effort to meet the demands of the sea farmers but he paid little attention to the broadcasts that came over the videoscope. Then one evening after another day of futile work he visited Miss Hartly; as always she was delighted to see him and willingly gave herself to him. Robert was filled with the wonderful lassitude that comes after making love though he never thought of love when he was with her.

"Have you heard the latest news?" she asked.

He shook his head. "I don't think I ate lunch today," he said, "let alone take time to watch the videoscope."

"I'll get you something," she said, moving away from him and going into the kitchen area. "I guess," she said, talking while she prepared a sandwich for him, "that the food situation will become much worse now that there's trouble."

"I had not noticed it was bad," he answered.

She returned to the bed with the sandwich and a glass of milk. "That's because you don't pay any attention to the world around you."

He wolfed down the sandwich and milk without stopping to speak. When he was finished he said, "I guess I really was hungry."

She laughed. "You ate that just like a small boy who can't be bothered to take the time to properly chew his food." She took the plate and glass back to the kitchen, washed them, and then returned to the bed.

Robert put his hand on her bare shoulder. Each time he made love to her he always felt as though he had done something wrong. It wasn't the sex that bothered him but the fact that she was assigned to be his sex partner whether she liked it or not and for that reason he tried to be considerate of her feelings. "Perhaps," he said, "once I find what I am looking for, we'll be able to go out to the entertainment area and have dinner—"

"Haven't you heard anything about the raid?" she asked.

"What raid?"

"Wait," she told him, "I am sure that the videoscope will have all the latest reports from the front." She left his side and switched on the videoscope. "Yes, it's being covered right this moment." She returned to him.

Robert gave his full attention to the voice and the picture on the screen.

The voice said, "At dawn today the city of Ponce on the south coast of Puerto Rico was destroyed by a raiding party of sea farmers. The pictures you are now seeing are all that remain of the city . . ."

Robert bolted up. He couldn't believe what he was

hearing and seeing. His first impulse was to shout a denial at the screen and accuse the government of a terrible trick; but very quickly he realized that it was true. "The fools!" he said harshly. "The stupid fools." He turned to the woman. "Now they don't have any chance of getting the government to—"

"Oh yes!" she exclaimed. "I know all about it. For the last two weeks the newspaper and the programs on the videoscope have been filled with information about the sea farmers and what they want. I think it's terrible that they should demand so much—"

"What?" Robert asked and wheeled around to face her.

"Well," she said, "they don't have to work terribly hard. Everything is automated and besides they are a lazy lot. They are already getting more than they deserve."

He was about to contradict her but realized that it would be useless.

"You should know all about them," she said. "You were down there."

"Yes," he answered, "I know all about them." He gave his attention to the screen.

"General Teateau's strike force is already in the field," the commentator said. "To give you a complete moment-by-moment coverage of the punitive action which has been mounted against the rebels the government will provide complete video coverage of the action. We switch you to General Teateau's headquarters aboard the assault hovercraft off the island of Barbuda."

Another commentator came on. "The General un-

der order from the Council of Five is preparing to launch an assault against the Barbuda Station. Excuse me, General, may I have a few words with you?"

Teateau nodded.

"Do you expect any opposition?" the commentator asked.

"This is a punitive expedition," Teateau said harshly. "It will make no difference whether or not there is opposition; the blood of those who died in Ponce earlier today must be accounted for. We will take no prisoners. In our eyes this crime was against every citizen in the world and cannot go unpunished."

"Then you mean to destroy the Barbuda Station?"

"Absolutely."

"Will you destroy other stations such as the one on Martinique and—"

"The government has been patient to the point of absurdity," Teateau said. "What the sea farmers could not achieve by damaging the harvest, they have tried to do by force of arms. For the protection of every citizen in the world such wanton acts must be severely punished."

"Will you bombard the station and then send in your men?"

"We must assume that the rebels will return our fire," Teateau said. "Therefore we are going to use our most advanced weaponry, short of nuclear devices."

"Will that include nerve gas?"

"Only if resistance is stiff. Now if you'll excuse me I must return to the work ahead."

"Thank you, General, thank you very much. I know that you have the best wishes for a successful and speedy conclusion to this campaign . . ."

"Will they really show us the battle?" the woman asked.

"I am sure they will," Robert answered. His first reaction was to dress and leave. He had no stomach for what would soon be shown.

"This is so terribly exciting!" she exclaimed, and she reached up for his hand. "Stay with me, please."

He lay back and with his hand on her bare breast waited for the battle to begin. Though he knew Louise would die, he was drained of emotion. Watching death and destruction on the videoscope removed him and tens of millions like him from the reality of what they saw. No, he could feel nothing, and he didn't even try.

XVI

Zahn had foreseen much of what was happening. After the strike force retaliated for the raid on Ponce, those sea farmers who managed to survive Teateau's assault formed marauding bands that harassed the occupying forces. Munsey had been killed, but another man took over the leadership and under his able direction the tens of thousands of square miles that made up the sea farm were rendered unusable for years to come by the systematic destruction of the undersea fencing, the sonic devices that guided the fish, and most of the automatic equipment that once made the area one of the world's major sources of food.

In the weeks that followed the government sent the strike force to other sea farms, either as members of an occupying army or a punitive expedition. Starvation was no longer the specter that loomed in the shadows. It had become a flesh-and-blood reality, with children and old people dying first.

The Council of Five convened several emergency sessions to deal with the mounting crisis but found that there was no solution. At its last session Zahn reported to the Council that elements of the strike force would have to be sent to Europe, India and

Australia to quell the civil riots that had broken out. During the meeting Mazda openly denounced the president and other members of the council for allowing the condition to get so far out of hand.

The president rebuffed the attack and claimed that if Mazda had any specific recommendations that would have averted the situation he should have brought them forth. A heated argument followed which solved nothing. Just as the meeting was about to end, Mazda again took the floor. "Gentlemen," he said, "I regret to inform you that as of this moment the Council of Five no longer exists."

The president and the other members jumped to their feet.

"Sit down," Mazda told them. "If you look about you you will see that at every door there is an armed guard. I assure you, gentlemen, that they will shoot to kill the first member of the council that does not obey me."

"You cannot do this!" the president shouted.

"I can and I have," Mazda answered confidently. "I will not allow you or the other members of the group to bring us to total ruin. Consider yourselves under arrest."

Zahn stood up. "Guards, escort the members of the council to the Government Security Building."

The guards moved forward and herded the men out of the room. When they were gone Zahn said to Mazda, "The people have already been told about the change in government."

Mazda nodded and said, "It was easier than I thought it would be."

"I have sent a message to Teateau," Zahn said. "He

should be here by nightfall. Then I think we should sit down and discuss the future."

Mazda agreed. He asked what Zahn thought should be done with the prisoners.

"They must be destroyed," Zahn replied simply.

"I will sign the necessary papers," Mazda said.

Zahn nodded and left the council room. There were a great many things that had to be attended to. The most important, though, was to make sure that the people responded favorably to the new government. Zahn immediately went to the video communications center and personally went on the air to explain what had happened. He told the people that Mazda would solve the food problem and once that was done many other innovations could be expected. His speech lasted less than ten minutes, and he returned to his office where he relaxed preparatory to his meeting with Mazda and Teateau at which he would finally reveal the full scope of his plan. There would be time enough to have Mazda relinquish the full control of the government to him. He slipped off his shoes, closed his eyes, and leaned far back in his chair. Things had been going so well that he could afford an hour of sleep during the afternoon.

The change in the government had no effect on Robert. He was still driving to find the answer to the problem, but now he was moved by another force than the pressure which Zahn and the director of the Institute had placed on him. Even his knowledge that the people of the world could not live without taking most of their food from the sea had no real mean-

ing for him. So many thousands were dying each day that death from starvation held no terror for him. What drove him was an inner need to come to a rational understanding of what had really happened. Though the government still focussed on the sea farmers as the major cause for all the ills which had now befallen the people of the world, Robert knew that it was a lie. That the truth lay hidden somewhere in the sea.

He stopped visiting Miss Hartly and devoted more and more time to his work. He took a new approach and under very controlled conditions recreated sea water. It was a long laborious process, but it gave him his first insight into what had happened in the sea when the various forms of marine life he introduced into the tank went through their reproductive cycles. He repeated the experiment from beginning to end several times in the next few days. Then one night he fell asleep on the laboratory bench and dreamed that he was once again under the sea with Jessup Coombs, only this time instead of facing the killer whales they were battling some vague shadow that was filtering through the sea fences and invading the sea farm.

He saw Jessup so very clearly. The man was trying to tell him something. Robert moaned in his sleep. Jessup waved toward the open ocean and then Robert heard the words, "*It's coming from there. See how it stains the water. See what it does to the marine life. Nothing will grow, nothing will live because nothing will reproduce.*"

Robert was suddenly awake. He knew the answer.

He was annoyed with himself for not realizing it before; Jessup's encounter with the renegade sharks should have tipped him off, but if that didn't then his own experience with the killer whales should have. The sharks and the killer whales were fleeing from something. Whatever it was that made them charge into the sea farm could not be seen because it was dissolved in the sea.

Quickly Robert took his analysis reports out of the file. Everything was accounted for, all the major constituent compounds that make up sea water including an infinitesimal amount of unclassified residue. Robert had no doubt that he would find what he was looking for there.

For the next twenty-four hours he never left the laboratory. He collected several micrograms of residue from boiling off huge quantities of sea water and then began the spectro-electronic examination. Several isotopic forms of the elements were present but there were two other organic compounds which he could not identify.

He photographed their spectral lines and recorded their electrical characteristics. He placed this information in a matching computer, hoping that there would be some information on the unknowns. The computer's answer was negative. He programmed the computer to give the most probable allied chemical type. The computer replied by producing a readout of chemicals resulting from the treatment of sewage. Many of these were unstable compounds and changed as soon as they were discharged into salt water. Then quite suddenly Robert understood what

had happened, what, in fact, was occuring at that very moment and what would continue to happen. The enormity of it made him dizzy.

"You can't expect me to believe you," Zahn said.

"You asked me to find the cause," Robert answered, "and I did."

Zahn didn't know whether the man was bluffing or not. He didn't seem to be the kind to. Besides, what purpose would it serve? "Let me see if I understand you," Zahn said. "You found some chemical which is produced by our chemical treatment of the sewage which we discharge into the sea?"

"Yes."

"And this chemical is lethal to marine life?"

"No," Robert answered. "It prevents them from reproducing and thus the species dies off."

"And its effects cannot be neutralized?"

Robert shrugged. "Perhaps in time, but it might take months, even years, to find a neutralizing agent."

Zahn tapped his finger on the desk. "Then what is your recommendation?"

"I have none."

"What if you are wrong?" Zahn asked.

"I do not think I am. The sea has been poisoned—not recently, but over many thousands of years. The effect of this chemical is cumulative. What has taken so many millenia to happen can not be stopped by—" He smiled. "Even the government."

"You realize what this means?"

"Yes, even greater starvation and more deaths."

"I do not believe you, Doctor. You are too calm

about this matter for it to be as serious as you say."

"Calm is not the right word," Robert said. "I am resigned."

Zahn leaped to his feet. "You have been a troublesome individual from the beginning," he shouted. "I think that this is the way you wish to strike back at the authorities for having punished you and, yes, for killing your mistress on Barbuda."

Robert remained silent.

"Now, tell me once and for all—"

"It is the truth," Robert said, even before Zahn had finished.

"Very well, we shall see!"

"I am afraid we shall," Robert said.

Zahn pressed a button on the desk. The door slid open and two guards entered. "Take Dr. Robert Wilde to the maximum security section of the government prison."

"Putting me in prison," Robert said quietly, "will not alter the truth. It is what it is, nothing more and nothing less."

"Take him out of here," Zahn shouted.

Part V: *AND THE GREAT SHROUD OF THE SEA ROLLED ON AS IT ROLLED FIVE THOUSAND YEARS AGO.*
(Herman Melville)

XVII

Robert's cell in the maximum security section of the government prison was ten feet long and five feet wide. It contained a cot, a sink and a toilet bowl. A single electric light glowed night and day, and though Robert could not tell where the monitoring devices were, he knew that his every move was closely watched. At one end of the room, placed high in the bare wall, was a window. There were no bars on the window and it gave him a clear view of the northern sky. He was given nothing to read and no one ever came to see him. His food, what there was of it, was passed to him through an opening in the steel door.

Three days after his arrival he became aware that the water pipes connecting the sink and toilet bowl were used as a communications system by the prisoners. It took him the better part of a week to understand the primitive method of using a series of quick and slow raps to spell out letters of the alphabet and form words and then sentences.

Somehow the other prisoners had learned that he had joined them and shortly began to signal him. Once he had learned the code he answered their ques-

tions. They wanted to know who he was and why he had been put in prison. He answered the first question but not the second and he realized that they respected his right not to answer.

Information about the outside world came from the other section of the prison where those men were kept who were not considered by the authorities to be security risks. From them Robert learned about the many wars that were raging in various parts of the world and that the government rocketed all nuclear weapons into space to prevent them from falling into the hands of the insurgents.

Less than three months after Robert was sent to prison word came that Zahn, who had become Chancellor of the World, Mazda, and General Teateau had been mobbed and beaten to death just outside of London. But the government continued as before, though most decisions were now made by the computers.

There was a rumor that all prisoners would be freed, but that was quickly dispelled when day after day nothing happened. From time to time Robert could see huge columns of smoke. He asked the other prisoners if they also saw smoke. They all did. Then Robert was told that everything on the outside had stopped and the people had formed marauding bands that fought each other for food.

For three days Robert had no food, but toward the end of the third day there were several loud explosions and the light in the ceiling went out. Robert ran to the window. The city was filled with smoke. He started to rap on the pipe when suddenly one of the other prisoners told him that the door to the cell was no longer locked. He tried his door. It swung

open. He moved quickly into the corridor, to where he remembered the elevator was. It was not operating. He returned to his cell and tried to contact the man who had signaled him but received no answer.

Once again he explored the corridor. There was a door leading to a stairway at the far end but when the power failed it had automatically locked. He returned to his cell and stretched out on his cot.

Sometime during the night he was awakened by a tapping. He listened closely to what he was being told but the message stopped. He began to rap on the pipe but failed to get a response. He returned to his bed. He had been told that the people had dragged the other men from their cells and that there was a great deal of screaming.

The following day dawned raw and cold. Robert went to the window and looked at a gray sky, and as he lowered his eyes he realized that it was snowing outside. For the first time in the many months he had been in prison he stopped to think about John and wonder what had happened to him. He also thought about Marion.

He left the window and returned to his cot. He did not have to be outside to know what had happened. The details of what starvation did to people were too grotesque to even contemplate, but he knew that the world as he had known it no longer existed.

He placed his hands behind his head and closed his eyes. He was not happy in that world. He had made a mess of his life, not willingly, but because he had tried to do something that was his own. Perhaps he would have been better off separating from Mar-

ion when she had first asked, instead of trying to hold them together.

He rose and returned to the window. The snow was now falling in big wet flakes. He remembered the first time he had looked at a snowflake under a microscope. He was so surprised at what he had seen that he thought his father had played a trick on him. Such beauty! A moment later he was no longer thinking about snowflakes. His mind was filled with images of Louise and a familiar ache filled his loins.

He shut his eyes and saw her as she lay next to him, her long black hair spread out against the white pillow. Her soft blue eyes looking at him, telling more than words ever could. The intense warmth of her naked body pressed against his!

Suddenly his reverie was interrupted by the sound of something smashing against the door at the far end of the hall. Again and again the blow reverberated in the corridor. Robert left his cell. He could not hear any voices but the smashing blows continued. Then it stopped. A few moments later an explosion followed. The door was blown open.

He looked at the people.

The sight of him stopped them. Then they began to scream.

Robert realized what had happened to the other prisoners. Slowly he backed away, turned, and ran to his cell, closing the door behind him. The moment he was alone he realized how foolish it had been to run. He could not escape them.

He moved beneath the window and looked at his cell door. It swung open. Three men stood framed

by it. They were in rags. Their bodies were gaunt. They were bearded and their eyes bloodshot.

They began to move.

Robert's first reflex was to press back against the wall, but he stopped himself. If they meant to kill him he could not stop them. He would not want to. All that he loved, all that he valued was already dead.

Behind the first three came fifty or sixty of the others. There were some women with them. The three stopped in front of him. The tallest one said, "You know?"

"Yes," Robert answered.

"It is the only way now."

Robert nodded.

Those before him were members of the species *homo sapiens*—the animal called man, cannibal by instinct with the drive to devour the flesh or the spirit. He had come full circle and once more would begin the long hard road toward civilization. Maybe the next time he could keep his tenuous hold on a million years or so of life, death, war and hope. Could it be worth the effort?

The next instant he was in the hands of the three. They dragged him into the midst of the others, and as the many hands tore his body apart he could feel one huge lung-bursting scream well up from the depths of him but it never left his body. A woman bent over him and tore his throat open. He saw her very clearly. The last thing he tried to say was, "Thank you, Miss Hartly."

Then he died.

THE END

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